



The Gripping Story Of A City Threatened With
Annihilation By A Raging Prehistoric Monster

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GORG0

Carson Bingham

This classic thriller is now on the screen as a
spectacular King Brothers' Technicolor Production

MONSTER ON THE LOOSE

Sam Slade didn't believe in Gorgo until he saw the monster's hideous scaly face, its slimy green talons and the massive mouth that could swallow a killer whale.

Sam didn't believe in love, either, until he met virginal Moira McCartin and helped her to discover the deep passions slumbering within her.

Moira taught him to love and Gorgo taught him to fear. Spewn from some sub-oceanic cavern, the monster catapulted from the sea, threatening death for all who challenged it.

Captured, it presented even more of a problem, for deep in the bowels of the sea was a larger, more vicious monster, even now rising from the depths to rescue its offspring and to destroy everything in its path—battleships, tanks and half of London!

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Christopher Rhodes**

Screen Play by

JOHN LORING and DANIEL HYATT

Original Story by

EUGENE LOURIE and DANIEL HYATT

Directed by

EUGENE LOURIE

Produced by

FRANK KING and MAURICE KING

A Monarch Movie Book

GORGO



Carson Bingham

*Based on an original screenplay
by John Loring
and Daniel Hyatt*

MONARCH BOOKS, INC.



Derby, Connecticut

GORG0

A Monarch Movie Book

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P.V.S EBOOK

GORGEO

Part One:

CATACLYSM

Chapter 1

I had tried to argue Joe Ryan out of making that last dive with the aqua-lung to prowl the freighter hulk we'd found. But he was the boss, and what boss will ever listen to you?

In the thirty minutes or so since he'd gone down, the sky over the North Atlantic had turned a dirty yellow, like moldy lemon custard. The sea surface was flat and oily, without a ripple visible for miles. Something was going to happen. An ominous oppressiveness hung in the air. It crushed down on all of us, like a solid weight.

I turned and moved across the deck of the *Triton*, past the rugged little bathysphere we kept lashed amidships. When you're working the salvage racket, you use the best and latest equipment. The initial outlay costs an arm and a leg, but in the long run, class pays off. Even in a gambler's game like salvage, you only play the sure thing.

The Bos'n, a big, solid Irishman named Jack Finn, was leaning on the rail with three of the crewmen, staring off into the western sky. The crewmen were a taciturn bunch of Gaels we'd signed on in the Galway Bay area. They never said much, and they were a superstitious lot. Whenever they had any serious talking to do, they did it in Gaelic.

As far as I could see, something was eating them now. They kept their eyes averted, squinting seaward, and they muttered among themselves in their own language.

A flock of birds headed toward the *Triton*, flying low and purposefully. They flew in a soaring V, knifing through the sulky sky. A strange, muted turbulence began to swell the surface of the unnaturally calm waters. Ominous lethargic ripples roiled the glassy surface.

"Boats," I called.

The big Irishman approached me with the solid widespread gait of a man who has spent most of his life on the deck of a ship. A cigarette hung out of the corner of his mouth, just under the nicotine stain on his upper lip. He was born with it there.

"What's up, anyway?"

Jack Finn raised an eyebrow and glanced at the yellow sky. He had his thumbs hooked in the belt of his dungarees, and his sweat-and-salt soaked skivvies bulged under his heavily muscled chest and forearms.

"The weather's getting foul." His words came out in a rich, true peat-bog brogue.

Motioning him after me, I crossed the deck out of earshot of the crew. We leaned over and watched a long spiraling trail of air bubbles that rose to the surface of the water next to the ship.

The Bos'n glanced at the watch on his massive wrist. "He's been down a half hour already."

"Damn fool. He'll stay till his air runs out if he thinks he can latch onto a buck's worth of salvage."

I glanced up at the sun where it glowed blood-red in the thick yellow overhang—the damndest thing I've ever seen. It was as if the whole sky was slowly smoldering to ashes.

"I know these waters, Mr. Slade," Jack Finn said softly, "and I never seen the like of this. Something funny's going on."

I nodded. Over his shoulder I could see the crewmen up front, peering into the heavy sky. One of them gesticulated wildly to another. Unintelligible syllables of Gaelic drifted to me through the murky air.

"Boats," I said, "get over there and calm them down. They just might jump overboard and leave us high and dry."

Jack Finn grunted. "Superstition is all these Irishers got, Mr. Slade. But I'll do what I can."

Jack Finn moved away. I turned and peered over the rail again. There was no change below. The bubbles still curved upward, vanishing on the surface of the flat turbid sea. I could imagine Joe down there, his aqua-lung in position, peering out through his face mask. I wondered what he'd located. I closed my eyes and crossed my fingers. God, could we use a buck! We were in hock up to our eyeballs on this salvage rig, and if we didn't come up with some heavy scratch pretty soon, we'd have to run for Tahiti or be repossessed.

Thirty-five minutes, I mused. Not that I blamed Joe for making a thorough recon. It had taken us a week just to find the wreck. And now, with this damned storm coming up, we'd have to abandon it just when we were getting close. I cursed soundlessly and spat into the brackish water.

Just our luck. Just our lousy stinking luck.

As I stood there, the sky went dark. It was almost as if I were standing in a room filled with normal daylight while someone slowly drew all the blinds shut. It was the same feeling you get when you're going to pass out. And it was fast.

I looked up. The sky was night. The clouds were mushrooming like the smoke from an oil-well fire. The sun was gone. It was twilight and growing darker.

I tore myself from the rail and headed for my lung and fins. As I

moved I pulled my skivvy shirt out of my dungarees and hauled it over my shoulders. I got out of my shoes and was unbuckling my pants when I heard a sound behind me.

I turned and there was Joe, standing dripping on the companionway, looking like some creature out of the deep.

He flipped back his mask and I could see an idiotic grin of greedy triumph on his sharp, narrow-cheeked features.

"We're in Sam!" he cried. "Swing that forward boom out. I want a cable over the side!"

I looked at him sourly. "You're kidding?" I nodded up at the sky and pointed to the water. "Look at that weather."

Joe turned. "It was getting a little rough down under," he admitted. "Damn it! Just when we get our hooks into something, Mother Nature screws it up for us!"

"No use standing here and cussing. From here on, it's a one-way trip—straight down."

I could see Joe's hands knot into fists. His face got a strained, bitter look. His yellow eyes were as narrow as slits. I'd seen him that way before, in Korea, where we served together. He was a killer at heart. A dangerous man. Right now I knew he'd like to take on the whole damned North Atlantic Ocean.

"No sir!" he snapped. He wheeled on me. "Give me that cable hook. There's a ten thousand dollar gyrocompass down there on that rustbucket. I'm staying until I get it!"

"For God's sake, Joe! Don't be damned fool—you'll get us all killed!"

He wheeled and gripped the rail in frustrated rage. And as he stood there, glaring out at the sea, we both saw it happen. It was as if the whole ocean swelled like a blowout in a tire tube. The horizon bulged, and the ocean's surface lifted for what seemed to be miles. Then it drew back, separating, and in its center a huge ball of fire bloomed out like some rank, poisonous flower.

"My God!" Joe gasped. His jaw sagged.

The explosion came then. The *Triton* shuddered as the shock waves hit her steel plating. We saw steam shower out of the fireball—steam and ashes and molten rock. It seemed as if the big blob of erupting, exploding material from the earth's center rose miles in the sky. Possibly it was only a thousand feet or so. I'd never know.

The ocean settled back into its normal horizon line, and a cone-shaped mass of glowing red rock thrust itself up out of the turgid, boiling sea. Flames shot from the point of the cone, and red-hot flaming lava belched forth, flowing down its sides. When the molten

rock hit the water, more steam swirled into the air, all but obscuring the newly formed volcanic crater.

“Boats!” Joe yelled. “Get the anchor up! Quick!”

“Aye aye,” the Bos’n cried. He yelled orders to the crew and kept saying, “*Corraigh ort! Corraigh ort!*” He was telling them to hurry. He turned and raced for the donkey engine and kicked it instantly into action.

I stood there, frozen to the deck plates. I couldn’t move a muscle. All I could do was gape at the cataclysm in the ocean. Clouds of steam and ashes fanned out and stinking, foul air boiled over the *Triton*. Red-hot stones hit the surface of the ocean about us with sizzles and hisses.

When I could wrench my gaze away from the awesome sight in front of me, I saw that Jack Finn had two crewmen helping him at the winch, hoisting the anchor chair through the hawse pipe. Throughout the din of the metallic rattling I heard Joe hollering at me.

I turned.

“Batten her down, Sam!”

Joe leaped up the companionway to the bridge. I moved then, released from whatever spell held me, and dashed about securing everything on deck. I never worked so fast in all my life. All the while it was getting darker and hotter and the air was turning more sulphurous. There was the smell of gunsmoke in the air, the smell of rotten eggs.

I joined Joe in the bridge room. He was yelling down the speaking tube and jangling the engine telegraph.

“Full speed! Give it all you’ve got!”

He flipped the wheel around eastward, waiting for the screw to grab hold. We both looked through the window at the newly-formed volcanic upthrust.

The entire horizon was jet black now—a continuous cloud of smoke, ash and lava. The sea was building up around the blackened cone, dancing wildly like an enchanted incarnation to some strange other-world melody. And then came the second blast—a thunderous, violent, eruption ejecting rock, fire and steam from the volcano’s center.

“My God!” Joe cried. “Look!”

Around the bottom of the volcano, evenly formed and swelling majestically appeared a huge tidal wave, rising slowly and inexorable from the base of the cone, moving ponderously outward in an ever-widening circle.

The wave swelled turgidly, dull red in the strange unearthly glow of the sky. It flowed toward us like blood. The deck of the *Triton*

shuddered under us as the engines pulsed. We began to move. But we were not moving fast enough. Behind us the huge comber moved steadily closer, rising into a massive mountainous crest, bearing down on us like the superhuman agency of some malignant sea devil.

The crewmen clutched the deck rails for support, to keep from being hurled overboard by the thrust of the wave. Jack Finn, his big burly body straining against his skivvies, held tightly to the mooring of the donkey engine, gazing up fearlessly and curiously at the avalanche of water approaching us.

"Joe!" I cried. "Here it comes!"

The *Triton* shuddered heavily, listed slightly, and then in a tremendous surge of power, hurled high into the air, like a catapulted plane from the deck of a carrier. It was as if some giant hand had grasped us and shot us out of the water. There was nothing around us but yellow-black air, and ashes and sizzling rocks. I saw sky, and more sky, and black clouds and smoke.

The wheel was spinning around, Joe's hands bleeding and ripped by his struggle to control it. I tried to move toward him, but the deck was the steepest hill I'd ever tried to climb. I could not move against it. I found myself flattened to it, pulled down. I slipped and fell; then my clutching fingers found the bottom of the wheel. I pulled myself up. The deck immediately reversed its angle, and I crashed forward into the wheel. I saw a pinwheel of dancing colored stars and my head spun.

Then we righted again. I saw the ocean about us, a mass of whitecaps and waves forming a series of strange flat plateaus, arranged like moving escalator steps. And Joe and I were calmly holding onto the wheel, and it was not fighting us at all. Now we were headed in an easterly direction, exactly where we wanted to go. For one long, surprising instant there was silence all about us. The crewmen picked themselves up from the foredeck, shaking their heads. Jack Finn still clutched the donkey engine mooring. He looked around dazedly.

And then, with no warning, the sky vanished again. At our stern arose another mountain of water. If the first wave was a mountain, this was Everest. It bore down on us, towering and forbidding. We were done. Joe turned his greenish face to me, smiling sickly.

The deck shuddered, the engine gave a snarling screeching moan, and the *Triton* shook from stem to stern. We stood in a sea of water. The bridge room. The deck. Belowdecks. Salt water tore at my clothes, my eyes, my skin. I slipped and slid to my knees. One after the other Joe and I hit the deck, the bulkhead, the deck, the bulkhead. The *Triton* spun like a top, turning in every direction of the compass,

completely out of control.

I tasted blood and salt. I tasted rust and sulphur. The world was a thick, green swirl. I turned over, sliding on metal. And then again I was at the wheel, trying to right the *Triton*.

Joe was stretched out on deck.

“Joe!”

He looked up dazedly. Blood oozed out of his cut forehead, passing over his filmed eyes. He crawled to me, trying to stand. The *Triton* veered around. We were headed in an easterly direction, speeding along swiftly and gracefully. I looked out over the bridge.

It was the damnest thing. We were being carried along the crest of a gigantic tidal wave, like a surfboard. I took my hand from the wheel. The *Triton* continued straight ahead, plunging along, turning neither to port nor starboard, piercing through a wall of gray spray sheeting up in front of us from the crest of the wave.

Joe was standing beside me, shaking his head groggily, staring out through the bridge window. All I could make out were vague shapes—whitecaps and spray intermingled.

By now the deck hands were getting to their feet and looking about them dazedly. Jack Finn shook himself dry, peering back at me. I gave him a nod. He grinned and waved a hand. But he did not let go of the donkey engine.

The spray vanished in front of us. Now I could see ahead of me.

“Joe!” I cried. “An island. Right there ahead of us.”

He was gripping the wheel too, his face tense, his eyes slitted. “My God! We’ll be driven on the rocks and smashed to bits!”

We were riding the second of the two tidal waves. I saw the first one ahead of us now, a vast, spreading blanket of water, crashing against a projecting spear of rock jutting out from the island. A lighthouse stood on the far tip end. As I looked, the first wave crashed against the base of the lighthouse, whipping on past it. To the right of the lighthouse lay a peaceful harbor, with sails and rigging of many ships plainly visible.

Even as we watched, horrified, from our grandstand seats atop the second wave, the first one hit the island. Water crashed over boat hulls, sent masts snapping in the air, banged ships against the long wood dock. Water shot up high in the air, jetting into a thin mist, leaving splotches of foam swirling about in its wake.

But the action of the first wave saved us. It hit the island and bounced back against our oncoming wave, cutting across it, dissipating its force. As we lay there outside the little harbor, we could actually feel the throb of the *Triton*’s screws as they grabbed the water

and took hold.

Wondering where we were, we brought the *Triton* slowly in toward the island.

As if it mattered any more where we were. It was enough to be alive after the fantastic beating we had taken.

I sank back against the bulkhead while Joe piloted the *Triton* toward the harbor, thinking that I'd love to give it all up for a job in a factory. The hell with the wide-open sea. I'd had it.

In spades.

Chapter 2

Next morning, the water was calm enough for us to sail into the harbor of the island. It was misty and damp, but better weather than the day before. The island itself was a round, flattish hunk of rock and dirt, covered with the scrub brush and grass so familiar to the Irish Coast and its islands.

We anchored clear of the wreckage in the middle of the harbor.

"Not much of an island," Joe observed.

"Seems kind of spare," I agreed.

"Villagers must fish for a living."

"If you can call it a living," I grinned.

"How long do you figure it'll take to get the ship back into shape?" Joe asked, glancing warily at me.

I shrugged. "I checked with Jack Finn. You want to hear the bad news now?"

Joe grimaced. "Might as well."

"Sprung plates in the bilge," I ticked off one finger. "Salt in the fresh-water tanks. And a hell of a mess on deck."

Joe made a face.

"Three or four days, the way Jack figures it."

"That's the way the cookie crumbles." Joe waved his hands in mute resignation. "Come on. Let's get ashore and see what they've got in the way of supplies. We'll need fresh water."

We climbed down into the *Triton's* launch and Joe took the wheel. He guided it carefully, and as we drew closer to the shore, I could see the terrific damage that the storm and tidal waves had done. Broken pieces of masts floated in the water. Dead fish and waste swirled about us. I could see bits of sail and rope half-submerged.

The shore hadn't escaped damage either. Shutters hung lopsided on the houses of the village; and windows were broken, glass was scattered about. Roofs had been smashed in by flying debris. Pools of water had washed up onto the shore and now stood reflecting the dull, misty gray sky.

As we came in, I could make out the townspeople poking in the rubble, trying to clear away the worst of the wreckage. Men with lined faces lifted their heads and stared at us with dull eyes. Women, their hair awry, their faces blank with shock and sorrow waited us with mute curiosity. Only the children seemed to be enjoying themselves,

running around and throwing household objects about with carefree abandon.

"They got a dock, anyway," Joe said. "And water."

I looked over at the dock and water tank. The dock hadn't come through the tidal wave unscathed. It was broken in the middle, some of the planks torn up and hurled into the sea.

"Pretty hard hit, looks like," I said. My eye caught sight of something in the water just out of reach of the launch. "Joe!"

He turned. An ugly reddish brown stain was drifting in from the sea, moving along lazily with the incoming tide. Dead fish floated in the midst of the red smear. They looked like cod, but they weren't like any cod I had ever seen before.

They were startlingly grotesque abominations. One of them had burst wide open, like an overripe watermelon. It was almost as if it had exploded from the enormous pressure of great sub-oceanic depths. Then I saw one that made me want to retch.

I pointed. Joe looked, and blinked.

It was a fish with a huge, malformed disproportionately massive head and long, rapier-like teeth, it had four rudimentary legs. It looked exactly like some creature from another planet.

I leaned over and hauled the monstrosity in with a boat hook. I held it in my hand, trying to keep my stomach from turning over. Something about it filled me with the dread of the unknown—along with the natural nausea anyone feels for a dead and stinking thing.

"I've never seen anything like that before. How about you?"

"Good Lord, no," Joe said, shuddering.

I tossed the fish back. I looked around at the red stain, and the debris drifted by.

"It was that volcanic explosion." I said. "It tore up the bottom of the ocean and released these deep-sea fish. No wonder they exploded. They're built for heavy deep-down pressure."

Joe guided the launch to the dock and tied up. We climbed out and hopped onto it. We passed a couple of men already at work on the planking. One of them glanced surreptitiously at us.

"I'm no linguist, but I do know a couple of words." I tried to scramble a translation. "*Máistir poirt*," I said.

They merely stared at me and shrugged. Then one of them pointed vaguely toward the cliff past the village, muttered "McCartin." I looked in the direction he had pointed.

"Come on," I said. "One thing I know, Joe. It wasn't the word for 'welcome.' "

The old man had gestured to a rocky promontory which housed a lighthouse, a radio tower, and a white cottage. A winding, switchback path led up to it from the beach.

We trudged up the trail cut in the rock, gazing from time to time at the panorama of the harbor that spread out before us. We could see the broken ships, the ripped up moorings, the floating debris and jetsam.

Finally we reached the cottage and knocked on the door. After a moment, it opened and we stood looking down at a freckled-faced youth about twelve years old, with green eyes and weedy carrot-colored hair.

“Máistir poirt,” I said again in my best Gaelic, waiting expectantly.

The boy nodded, his eyes brightening perceptibly.

“’Tis the right place you’ve come to, then.” To our relief, he spoke English—with a slight brogue. He pulled the door open wider, and stood aside for us to enter.

I looked at Joe and he winked at me. We walked in.

And got the surprise of our lives. We were in a big room with wide windows and plenty of light. But it wasn’t an ordinary living room. It was a laboratory of some sort. I saw a microscope on a table, weighing scales, and some tools that looked like assaying equipment.

“The harbor master lives here?” Joe asked in astonishment.

“No, no!” the boy laughed. “My father. He’s a government man.”

I didn’t get that. “Who is he? What’s he do?”

“He’s an archeologist,” the boy said, pronouncing the word carefully as if he had been taught it with some pains.

“What’s his name?”

“McCartin,” the boy said promptly. “Kevin McCartin. I’m Sean.”

We shook hands solemnly.

“What do you do around here to help your father, Sean? Work with these gadgets?” I pointed to the scientific equipment.

“Mostly I clean the things he finds.” Sean grinned widely, showing his big, strong front teeth. “You want to see them?”

“You bet we would.”

We followed the red-headed boy into another room that was joined to this by a door. “It’s the storeroom,” Sean said with some pride.

The place looked like a junk shop. But what junk! I traded glances with Joe, then began checking off the items. These were artifacts, ancient antiques probably worth thousands of dollars to collectors. I recognized some of them—relics of ancient Ireland. Swords, battle axes, shields, helmets. There was even the prow of a ship. And some

Viking things, too. Viking and Irish, and all of them showing the obvious effects of long exposure under water.

“Sam,” Joe said softly.

I turned. He was pointing to a tall steel safe against the wall. He lifted his eyebrow in mute question.

“All this has been under the sea for, oh, a thousand years, they say,” Sean observed proudly.

I touched the gargoyle prow of a ship. “Viking?”

“No Irish,” the boy said excitedly. “But there was a sea-battle long ago, right off the bay here, with the Vikings. And we Irish drove them out and sank their ships! Fifteen years ago it was my father came here from Ireland to study the things brought up from sunken ships. I was born here.”

I took a closer look at the ship’s carved prow, and the gargoyle there sent shivers up and down my backbone. It was the personification of some ancient sea monster, with fierce eyes, a small mouth and lashing tongue, and with a frightening, supernatural look about them.

“Irish whisky carved this baby, I’d say.”

Sean shrugged. “That’s one of the ships the Irish lost,” he admitted. Then he pointed to the gargoyle’s face. “And that’s Ogra! He helped us. Oh, ’twas grand work Ogra did that day!”

I grinned. “Sounds like St. Patrick and the snakes.”

The boy looked around at me and started to laugh. But then he caught sight of something in back of me, and his face froze.

I turned. Hulking behind me, slouched over like a giant of some kind, stood a huge man with a flaming red beard, red hair, and eyes as blue as bottle glass. He was glaring at us, his hands clenched into fists the size of cantaloupes, his shoulder muscles bulging through his shirt.

“What’re you doing in here?”

I started to tell him, but he didn’t let me. He turned on the boy. “Get out!” he snapped.

Sean gave him a quick look, and then slipped out past him, glancing back cautiously.

Joe stepped forward. “I’m Joe Ryan. This is Sam Slade, my partner.”

The big red-bearded man grunted. “I’m McCartin. Salvage vessel, aren’t you?”

Joe nodded.

“I thought so,” McCartin rasped. “You have a permit to be in these waters?”

Joe frowned, bluffing it out. “Permit? From who?”

McCartin's blue eyes narrowed. "From Dublin." He turned and gestured toward the relics on the walls. "My boy told you about it, didn't he?"

"Said something about sunken ships."

McCartin's eyes cleared. He took a breath. "I don't make the rules, Ryan. This stuff has no real value except to a scientist." McCartin grinned, but he wasn't really the type who could pull it off. "Ever since these ships have been found, nobody else's allowed at Nara Island for more than twenty-four hours without a permit."

Joe grunted. His yellow eyes began to smolder. "Look, friend," he said, "I'm not seaworthy, and I won't be for three or four days. I got *driven* on this island. I didn't come here on any pleasure cruise!"

McCartin's face was a blank. "I'm sorry. I don't make the rules. But that's the way it is."

I could see by the way Joe's body was hunching up that he was about to unwind and blow his cork. I stepped halfway in front of him, smiling amiably, and nodding acquiescence.

"That's fine, Mr. McCartin We're afloat now. How about fresh water? That's what we need."

McCartin looked at Joe, then at me. He considered a moment. Behind me I could tell that Joe was subsiding. He was breathing more easily now and I knew his yellow eyes were not quite so poisonous.

"Okay," McCartin said. "You can come in to dock for that."

I nodded. "Thanks."

We started out of the storeroom. "No hard feelings," McCartin called to us.

I saw Joe's face. He turned, his eyes hooded. "No," he said. "No hard feelings." He grinned. Not even a word could do it better.

We went down the slope in front of the cottage, and were turning into the cliff pathway when suddenly, in front of us, stood Sean McCartin with a funny smile on his freckled face.

"Sean," I said. "What do you want?"

The boy's glance went over my shoulder up towards the cottage. From where we stood the cottage was cut off from view by a large rock outcrop.

"I want you to meet someone," Sean said, and called out behind him some words in Gaelic. It sounded like, "*Anois agus ni riamh, Moira*" Now or never *Moira*!

Then my jaw sagged. I could not speak. For standing right behind Sean, materializing there almost like a ghost, was the most gorgeous girl I've ever seen. She was about twenty, fully mature, with brilliant, flaming red hair. Her eyes were a dazzling sea-green. She was

beautiful in a wild, unsophisticated way. She wore no makeup. She had on a man's shirt, without a bra, and it fitted tightly to her full, upthrust bust. Her hips flared out at her waist, where dungarees clung tightly to her thighs.

She was an ungodly beautiful girl, in a strange, eerie way.

" 'Tis water you need?" she asked me in a singsong monotone, almost the tone someone uses who speaks English only by rote.

Joe moved forward, immediately letting his yellow cat's eyes run up and down her body. " 'Tis that!" he said.

The girl's eyes turned to him watchfully. Oddly enough, I could see a sudden interest aroused in her. A slight flush suffused her throat and cheeks under his steady scrutiny.

"We will pay for it," Joe said. "Won't we, Sam?"

I shrugged.

Joe's eyes were predatory and eager. "Can you lead us to the water?"

" 'Tis in a well. I shall fetch it to you."

"No!" Sean cried out fearfully. "If *he* ever finds out I've brought you to see these strangers, he'll kill me."

There was no doubt about who Sean meant by "he."

I reached out and grabbed Joe's arm. "Come on, Joe. Time's awasting. We'll be getting back to the ship ma'am," I continued, turning to Moira and nodding politely. "Send Sean down with some fresh water if you like. We'll pay him."

Moira nodded. Her eyes were level and calm. There was the cool of the forest and the depth of the sea in them. And they were looking straight into mine. I could feel something stir inside me down deep in my gut. Something that had been dead a long time. Something that I thought had been killed by just such a pair of eyes, a long time ago.

The girl vanished the same way she had come, around the rock outcrop and into the cliffside underbrush. Sean plodded back up toward the cottage across the slope.

We hurried down to the beach. Joe let out a low whistle, and chuckled! "What a broad!" he sighed. "No wonder her old man keeps her under glass. She's set the whole island—or any other island—on its ear! What a build!"

"She seems to be the wholesome type," I said quietly. "Not the kind you go for at all."

Joe leered at me, his yellow eyes slitted and glowing. "Wholesome! I saw that look you gave her, Sam. Don't be getting ideas about her! I don't want to have to wetnurse you through another assault rap!"

“You take care of your fleas,” I snapped, “and I’ll take care of mine.”

Joe chuckled. “That bitch Anita you got hung up by in the States wasn’t half the looker this tomato is, Sam. You got to admit that.”

I didn’t say anything. I was boiling. I thought I’d left all that behind me, wrapped up in a shopping bag in Port Arthur, Texas. But hell, you never leave a dame like Anita behind. She’s always with you, hitching a ride in your belly somewhere, watching everything over your shoulder. Joe was right. No sense getting wound up in any dame the way I had, and sweat out another assault rap trying to clobber the guy she’d two-timed me with. Next time, if things went the way they had before, I’d be up on a murder charge.

And no way out.

The hell with it. I was through with women—for good.

We headed for the dock. “I hope that well water’s as good as it sounds,” Joe remarked.

I nodded. I was thinking about something else, something that puzzled me. “You believe McCartin about that permit Joe?”

Joe snorted. “*Hell* no!”

We were just about to board the launch when four island rowing boats loomed up out of the mist beside the dock. Each was manned by four oarsmen, and carried a skin diver complete with equipment including a pouch on the belt. The oarsmen were resting on their paddles now, studying the same strange red stain in the water we’d seen on our way in.

“They got the same feeling about that blood we did,” Joe said.

I nodded.

“I wonder where they’re diving,” Joe muttered. “I think we’d swing a little more weight around here if we found out.” He looked at me significantly.

We moved to the launch and climbed in. The four diving boats rowed on out past us through the mist, heading for the open sea.

We did our reconnoitering that afternoon, in the launch, with Jack Finn at the wheel. And we found the four diving boats in a deep, secluded inlet not far from the harbor, about a quarter of the distance around the small island.

Jack Finn throttled down the launch at a signal from Joe, and we approached the divers in a wide cautious circle. The sullen boatmen eyed us malevolently.

Joe grinned and waved a hand casually, playing the Personality Kid. “Having any luck?”

The men in the boat didn’t answer.

“You try them, Boats,” Joe told the big Irishman. “In Gaelic.”

Jack Finn snorted. “They speak English as good as we do. They just pretend they don’t.” But he went ahead anyway.

“*Dia dhuit!*” And he rattled off some fast Gaelic I couldn’t follow. The boatmen snarled gutturals back at him. Jack Finn grimaced. “They got no time to be talking to strangers. McCartin does the talking on the island.”

Joe shook his head. I was watching the divers, and I could see that something had suddenly agitated them. I pointed to them and asked Finn to translate their gabble.

The Bos’n listened, and I could see his stolid face animated with sudden interest. He shifted his cigarette slightly and spoke. “One of the divers didn’t come up. They’re saying he’s gone.”

I looked at the big Irisher, startled. There was something funny about his odd use of the word. “Gone?”

He cocked his head toward the group of boats.

“They’ve got to go down and find him. But they’re scared of something.”

“Scared?” I looked at Joe. His eyes widened. There was a sudden intuitive communication between us. The blood stains. The fish that had burst. The strange abomination with the four rudimentary legs.

We watched the dive. Two men jumped. The others watched tensely. Instantly the first diver came back up. He shook his head. The second did not reappear. After a moment there were more excited mutterings from the boatmen.

Then, abruptly, the second diver popped to the surface, only a few feet from our launch, yelling incoherently, tearing off his diving mask. He took two frantic strokes to reach our launch. The man was beside himself with fear, his eyes wide and beaming with horror.

I reached out at the same time Joe did, and we hauled him into the boat, his eyes turned up in his head, and he went limp on the bottom of the launch.

I leaned over him, twisting him so he was in position for artificial respiration.

“He’s not hurt,” I said.

Joe went to work on the man. I could hear his breathing, odd, shallow and rapid. His body twitched convulsively. As he lay there, with Joe working at him something dropped out of the pouch at his belt. Joe bent over, reaching down in the bottom of the launch.

“Sam!”

I leaned down, looking in Joe’s hand, held low so none of the boatmen could see it. My eyes widened. He was holding three gold

coins of ancient minting. "That's what's bugging McCartin!" Joe hissed. "He's been looting this wreck. That's what he's keeping in his safe!"

I stared at Joe.

" 'No value except to a scientist,' " Joe quoted drily. "Huh! We're going to make us some loot here before we leave, Sam! Real loot!"

I looked at him sharply, but before I could get a word out, the diver in the bottom of the boat gave a terrible twitch, gurgled out something that sounded like "arrachtach," and shuddered from head to toe. I reached out to touch him, but I knew the man was already gone.

Joe turned and felt the body. Finn's face was a frozen mask.

"He's dead," I said.

"Yes," Joe whispered. "But how?"

"You saw him come up," I said. "If you ask me, I think he died of fright."

Fright? What was there to be afraid of. *Arrachtach*? What did that mean? I turned to the Bos'n. "What's *arrachtach*?"

Jack Finn shook his head, avoiding my eyes.

"Monster," he whispered.

Chapter 3

About an hour later we'd pulled the *Triton* in to the dock, and I was working on a sheared deck plate bolt with a torch in my hands and a welding visor on when I heard someone call my name from the dock. "Mr. Slade! Mr. Slade!"

I looked down at the battered planking and saw Sean McCartin's freckled face and wide green eyes. He was watching me with a serious, unblinking expression.

I flipped the torch off, laid it down, and lifted the visor of the welding mask. "Hi kid," I grinned. "What's up?"

"I wish to speak to you," he said. "Alone."

I glanced around. "Shoot."

He shook his head. "I may be overheard."

Shaking my head at his tenacity, I walked to the rail and leaned over toward him. "Okay," I whispered loudly. "Nobody can hear us now. What is it?"

He cupped his mouth so no one could read his lips. "My sister Moira wants to talk to you."

I stared. "Moira?"

"Yes. This afternoon. Quickly before you sail."

I shrugged. Moira? A tryst? I hid my grin. Probably wanted me to dive for three pairs of nylons in Macy's.

"Where?"

"The cove beyond the lighthouse." Sean gestured across the harbor past the neck of rock that shot out into the sea. "It is not seen from our cottage."

"I should hope so," I said, with feeling. I glanced around. It was still foggy. "Any particular spot?"

Sean gave me the details.

"Tell her four-thirty," I said. "Sixteen-thirty, Irish style."

I took the launch and pointed the prow toward the lighthouse. The fog was in heavier than ever and as I pushed through the ghostly mist, I could see dim phantom shapes of masts and rigging moving aimlessly by me. Dead silence hung over the sea. The harbor stank of death. Gulls swooped down for pecks at the floating, bloated corpses of fish cast up by the tidal wave.

I passed the rocky point, and steered in close to the cliffs on the side

away from the harbor. There was nothing in sight—nothing but rolling fog and the choppy waters of the inlet ahead of me. The hum of the launch engine bounced back at me from the cliff's face. I kept going.

I saw the little beach. It was just as Sean had described it to me. Narrow, white and secluded. From here, even without the screen of convenient fog, nobody could see us. It was the perfect spot for a rendezvous. A steep cliff rose abruptly at the back of the sand strip. Through the fog I could see several vague black openings in the rock. Caves?

I beached the launch and secured it to a jogged rock. Then I crunched through the sand to the cliff. This was where Moira would be waiting.

But she was not there.

I sat down, lit a cigarette and stared into the fog. An eerie silence permeated the atmosphere, and the fact that I could not see more than six or eight feet in front of me began to work on my nerves. I suspected shapes of being people. The constant rumble of the surf assumed foreign sounds and became crunching footsteps, a human cough, a throat clearing.

Was the message actually from Moira? Or was this McCartin's little trick to ambush me? And if so, why? I shivered. My imagination was running away with me. Think sharp, Sam!

Then she was there. Like the wraith she was, she came out of the fog as if she had materialized out of nothing. I recalled the way she had confronted us on the cliff path. Was she really human, I wondered, or was she the sea sprite I had first imaged her? Lord, the fog was really getting to me!

"Hello, Moira," I said.

"Mr. Slade," she said, approaching me, glancing about her. She held up a finger for silence. She cocked her head, then nodded. "There is no one. We are alone."

I tugged on my cigarette and watched the smoke curl up in front of me. It never occurred to me to offer her a smoke. "What's on your mind?"

She came over and sat down beside me. I could detect the fresh, outdoor, oceanic smell of her. She was beautiful in the swilling fog, her flaming red hair dew-flecked, her clear white skin moist and cool.

"I have come to ask a favor of you," she said softly, her voice husky and burred with a melodious brogue.

"Line forms to the right," I said with a laugh.

She turned her face to me, and her sea-green eyes were round and

serious. "I do not joke, Mr. Slade," she said. "To you, nor anyone. You must promise me you will never let my father know I came to you."

"Rest assured," I said wryly. "And call me Sam."

"I am awkward with the English tongue," she said haltingly. "But 'tis the truth I must be telling. There is a heaviness in my heart that I must stay on Nara." She looked at me pleadingly.

"I get it. You don't like it here and you want to get away." I shook my head in disgust. I might have known it! Just another dame wanting water-taxi service!

"That's it, isn't it?" I went on, my voice beginning to rise. "You think we're running a passenger service to the mainland. Right, my charming colleen?"

Her mouth dropped open. She stared at me in astonishment.

But I was mad. Everybody who knows a guy with a boat invariably wants to hook a cheap ride. This broad with the wonderful body and the flaming red hair seemed to think she could buy a ride to the moon with a lift of the eyebrow and a rise of the breasts. Probably scented a short pleasure cruise to Galway Bay. The hell with that. I'd been suckered by enough dames in the past to know every angle of that game.

"Sorry, honey," I said. "No sale, like we say in the States."

The girl's cheeks flushed, and her eyes burned. Her breasts rose and fell angrily. She was Irish and she was quick-tempered, and now she was mad. I'd really riled her. That's me, Old Sam Smooth with the dames.

" 'Tis a cheap hussy you think I am!" she cried. "I'm willing to pay my way, Mr. Slade. 'Tis no favor I'm asking. What do you take me for—a charity case?" Her eyes blazing, she jumped to her feet. "For your information, I would ask your captain, but I know exactly what he wants from me!" Her cheeks crimsoned again. "I thought *you* were a gentleman, anyway. A worse mistake I never made!"

She wheeled from me and started running through the sand.

I moved fast. I spun her around, holding her stiffly in front of me. I had to laugh.

"Calm down, Moira. I keep forgetting you're Irish. I have a wee bit of the ould sod in me, too. Come on, now. Sit you down. Let's talk it out, shall we?"

She dropped her eyes and moved away from me, but she was calm again. She sat down. I joined her.

" 'Tis a long story," she said softly. "And I won't bother you with it. But I will tell you this: I must get of this devil's island before it's too late!" She closed her eyes and rocked back. "Or maybe, in truth, 'tis

already too late. I don't know."

The fog, the loneliness, the wind, the sea. I nodded. I knew what she meant. She was lonely for a normal life, a life among real live people, a life with young men about, not an island of ignorant villagers and indigent fishermen. Her father was an intelligent, educated man, and he had obviously tried to teach her all he could. She was a misfit here on Nara.

"Okay, so you want to see the world."

She turned her sea-green eyes to me. " 'Tis not just curiosity, Samuel," she said, saying my name for the first time. Or, at least something that sounded like it. In Gaelic it's *Somhairle*.

I grinned. "What is it, then?"

" 'Tis my father." She squinted through the fog, trying to pierce the veil of tiny droplets, trying to see something out in the watery cove. "A madman, he is, Somhairle," she whispered. " 'Tis his mind that is affected. Ever since the—" her voice lowered,—“the drowning of my own mother.”

"Drowning?" I stared at Moira. "I'm sorry."

"She walked into the sea, Somhairle, of her own accord, from right where we are sitting. Fifteen years ago, it was, when first we arrived. Walked into the sea in search of him. Dórach Dolan." She closed her eyes and crossed herself. "Her lover, he was."

Hanky-panky, I translated. McCartin's wife fools around with another man, McCartin's finds out about it and sends his wife to her death. Or was that it exactly?

"Suicide, you say? Are you sure?"

"She wanted to join Dórach," she said, turning her cool glance to me again. "Don't you see? My father—" her voice choked—"he knew what was going on between them. But once Dórach was dead, he could do nought to prevent her from going to join him."

"Dórach was killed at sea?" I asked, trying to fill in the story.

"Yes. Killed."

"Shipwreck? Fishing?"

She shook her head. "Diving. 'Twas the monster."

I had to laugh. "The Loch Ness monster?"

Her sea-green eyes regarded me levelly. "Ogra. The Monster of Nara."

I stared. I remember Sean's words. Ogra. The sea god.

"Some say," Moira went on, "that 'twas not the monster Ogra at all who carried off Dórach so that his body was never found. Some say 'twas Kevin McCartin who did him in down under the surface of the

sea—with his diving equipment, no less—but whatever they say, they all know that 'twas, indeed, a monster of some variety who destroyed Dórach, and then my own mother. Whether it be the monster Ogra, or the monster Kevin, if you would.”

“What about Sean? Is he your half-brother? If all this happened fifteen years ago . . .”

Moira nodded. “My father took up with another woman. Sean’s mother, Maigréad. But she could not stand him either. She stowed away in a supply freighter.” The sea-green eyes moved over my face. “You’re the first ones here who haven’t been thrown bodily off the island by my father.” She looked down. “He is afraid we will follow the rest of them, you see.”

She stared out to sea.

“And we will, you know. One way or another.” She turned, and her eyes were misted with tears. “Will it be you, Somhairle? Or must I wait forever?”

There was little more to our talk, really, and after explaining as gently as I could that there was no chance of her going with us, I climbed into the launch and sailed back to the *Triton*. I was afraid of what might happen to this strange, clean, true girl if she ever got on board with Joe Ryan near. It was a bad situation. I wanted to help her, but I could not.

As I climbed on board, Joe met me on the foredeck.

“After chow we do some more looking,” he told me. “I want to find out the truth about those gold coins.”

He winked at me and slapped me on the back.

It was dark when we finally got in the launch and headed for the spot where the divers had dived that afternoon. I cut the engine and turned to Joe.

“This is about it, isn’t it?”

He nodded. I couldn’t help shivering, not so much from the fact I was in my bathing suit in the night air which had suddenly turned clear and cold, but also from the fact I wasn’t sure what we were going to come up with. Frankly, I didn’t like it one bit. But I knew we needed the money, Joe and I. If we could get it here in some sunken wreck, why not?

We lowered two weighted containers to the bottom of the cove from the edge of the launch, and got into our lungs, fins, and face plates. Joe turned to me, indicating the big magnesium flare in the bottom of the launch. I nodded and picked it up.

“All set?” Joe asked, cradling the harpoon gun in his arm.

I nodded. I lit the magnesium flare and it whooshed into flame

immediately. I plunged it down into the water to shield it from any prying eyes, and lowered myself after it. Joe followed.

The submarine world slipped eerily by us as we moved down through it. Weird shadows writhed in the distance among the kelp and fish. The strange illumination of the flare reached out about us, painting a warped, surrealist picture of a maritime graveyard. Imbedded between rocky formations, the stripped wooden ribs of ancient ships loomed up like reconstructions of dinosaur skeletons.

I could see a carved wooden figurehead close by me, and I swam toward it. It was a gargoyle, similar to the one decorating McCartin's storeroom. But it wasn't Ogra. It was a Viking representation of the same thing—a Norse god of the sea.

As I studied the grinning, hideous distorted face, I was aware of a sudden darkening of the water directly above me, as though a huge shadow of some kind were passing by.

I stopped. So did Joe.

We looked up. It was a familiar sight—a killer whale, what scientists call *Orcinus*, the most aggressive and dangerous of aquatic mammals.

I held my breath. The killer whale could sense our presence, but it could tell exactly where we were. It passed over us, then gracefully arched back, moving warily and cautiously. It knew it could attack us, but it did not know how dangerous we were.

Joe moved toward me, and we both watched the big mammal. We had a problem: should we fight it with the harpoon gun, or just wait for it to go away? The shadow moved across us again, and I could see Joe sidling over to the edge of the nearest rock-formation, still watching above. I backed up too, and felt the flat face of a rock comfortably against my back; I stood there, keeping my eyes on the killer whale.

And then, before I could move, I felt something else—a clammy, rubbery tentacle slithering across my chest from behind. I looked down in horror. Somewhere in the rock formation behind me an octopus was hiding, waiting for one of us to move within range of its powerful tentacles.

I waved the flare about energetically, trying to attract Joe's attention. At the same time I slid my knife out of my belt and tried to angle it around so I could use it on the massive tentacle. As I fought to turn it, another rubbery tentacle slid out from behind the big rock and whipped around me. I could feel the tremendous power of the beast's vise-like grip. The rock edge pressed into my back.

My flare went spinning into the sand at my feet. Joe turned and started toward me. As he did so a third tentacle looped out to meet

him, coiling around his body, rolling him in closer. He fought to keep his arms and harpoon gun free, riding in with the snake-like arm, intent only on getting in close enough for a killing shot.

I could not breathe now. I could only fight with the knife, dragging its cutting edge impotently across the tough flexible hide of the tentacle. But now my arm was half imprisoned by the pressure against it, and I could only manipulate the blade with my wrist and fingers. It was like trying to cut through a truck tire with a dull hackknife. The air was completely squeezed out of my chest. Blackness began seeping in at the edges of my brain. I struggled to keep my consciousness, knowing I would die if I passed out, but the continual pressure was like the weight of a building crushing me.

I saw Joe's face behind his plate, anxious and pop-eyed, as the fourth tentacle coiled about him, pulling him in closer to me in a two-way death embrace. It's all over, I thought. All over but the keening.

Then I heard the dull, muffled explosion as the tip of the harpoon went off. The shaft sank up to the hilt in the creature's gelatinous body. At the instant of explosion, I was suddenly aware of the sweet breath pouring into my chest again, of the slow ebbing of the pressure from my battered body, of the release of the monstrous grip on my flesh and bones.

Sobbing to get my breath, I reeled backward to the ocean floor, and saw the great octopus for the first time. Even as I landed on the sand, it shuddered violently, and the color of its body changed from a dirty-green to a spreading reddish brown. The dangerous, powerful tentacles collapsed and became limp like deflated sausage balloons.

In its death agony the beast emitted a massive, jetting cloud of black ink-like fluid which flooded around us, obscuring everything the flare had illuminated, and blacking out Joe's body.

I moved through the murk, stumbling.

The next thing I knew, I was staring into Joe's faceplate. He had lifted me from the sandy floor and carried me some distance. Beside us the flare burned its shimmering illumination. I could see the worried, concerned expression in Joe's yellowish eyes as they peered through the mask front.

I waved to him that I was okay, and pointed upward.

Joe nodded, and started to ascend. Then he turned and immediately gave me a signal for caution.

I glanced up. There, in the dirty, gradually clearing waters, the shadow of the killer whale passed over us again. It had still not forgotten the two of us.

Joe pulled another harpoon out of his belt and loaded the gun. I

looked down across the rock formation close by and I could see the magnesium flare lying in the sand where I had dropped it still sending out its light.

Before I could move a foot toward it, the water around us shuddered violently, and a tremendous pulsating turmoil jolted everything. Schools of fish turned and fled into the darkness. The sand shifted on the ocean floor.

I stared into the murky, turbulent water above us. I could see something—not a whale, not an octopus, but something else—something fantastically huge and vague, like a great thunderhead, looming over us.

I backed up to the rock and hung on. The water about me swirled and ebbed, shuddering with the impact of the big thing moving about up there. Joe crept beside me, grasping for a handhold on a rock.

As we waited, the water about us whipped into a fury, and all at once there was a great jetting gush of blood as the thing attacked the killer whale. The entire sea around us turned a brilliant carmine, blotting out everything in a pinwheeling red haze.

Weakly we clung to the rock and gazed up at the red cloud. Then we looked at each other, and I hope never again see such a scared, awed, absolutely unbelieving expression on anybody's face as I saw on Joe's at that moment.

It took me a long time to breathe in enough courage to let go of that rock and swim up through the settling waters.

"What the hell did you see, Sam?" Joe asked me in a hushed whisper as we yanked off our aqua-lungs in the launch.

"I don't know," I said, my voice shaking. "But I sure never want to see it again."

Chapter 4

When we got back to the *Triton*, we found the Bos'n busy with the crewmen on the dock. They were working under a bright light shining from the deck of the ship. The men were sweating and heaving, trying to shake the huge water hose from the dock's water tank onto the deck of the ship. Jack Finn was cursing and bouncing around like a dog with fleas, alternately cursing and encouraging the straining Irishers.

We climbed on board, and Joe approached the Bos'n.

"Boats!"

"Yes sir," said Jack Finn coming up.

"When the hell can you get us out of here?"

Jack Finn thought a second. "Two, three hours."

"Make it snappy," Joe said, and turned to go below. At that moment I looked toward the beach in front of the village, and saw a number of torches burning brightly on the sand.

"What's that?" I asked casually. "Irish Clambake?"

Finn joined me at the ship's rail. Joe turned from the hatchway and came back.

Jack Finn shook his head. "Whatever it is, it's been going on for a couple hours. All the time you've been away."

As we watched, we could hear the muffled tolling of a church bell, booming monotonously and sonorously in the distance.

"Listen!"

I strained my ears, and then I could hear it too. It was a far-off moaning and humming, a gloomy lament, a wordless, keening cry in the night.

"Sounds like a wake," Joe said grimly. "That's a hell of a send-off for us. I'll be glad to see the last of this place!"

I heard someone behind me, and I turned. It was Sean McCartin. He too was watching the shore.

"'Tis a wake for the two divers who died this afternoon," Sean said softly. "One has not even yet been found."

Joe frowned. "What are you doing on deck, boy?"

Jack Finn interrupted. "I told him he could watch us, sir. I hope it's all right." He grinned. "The lad has a feeling for the *Triton* and the ocean, being an islander."

Joe considered a moment, and then nodded. "Okay. Be sure you git when I tell you git. We're sailing soon."

"Yes sir," said Sean. "But there is a message I came to deliver. In the excitement I've nearly forgotten."

Joe glowered. "What is it?"

"My father wants to see you." Sean looked from Joe to me, and then his glance dropped. "'Tis a fine rage he's in."

"A rage is it?" Joe snarled. "Come on, Sam. Let's see what the devil this joker's got up his sleeve."

We didn't have to go up to the cottage. We found the big red-bearded man standing on the beach surveying the torchlight activity with a jaundiced eye. He had his large hands on his hips, and was scowling at a group of villagers hauling a rowing boat along the sand into the water.

As we came up, we could hear him barking angrily in Gaelic, telling the men to keep away from him. All he got in return were sullen glances from the dour boatmen. Finally he turned away in disgust.

Then he saw us in the light of the flaming torches, and came stomping over.

"So there you are, you damned snoopers!"

Joe nodded. I was right beside him and I could see his arms tense up as if he were going to throw his fists at McCartin. I began to sweat. McCartin wasn't loved by the villagers, but we were loved even less. It would be a very fine bruahaha if it started. The thing we had to do was hold our tempers. I figured I was all right, but I could never predict Joe. I've seen him fracture a man's skull in a bar fight.

"So what's it to you?" Joe grinned wolfishly, his tone inviting trouble.

"I told you not to prowl the bay out there! My divers told me you've been smelling around, like a bitch in heat."

"Who's to stop us?" Joe asked, breathing heavily.

"Are you doubting I can?" McCartin cried angrily.

"Maybe I am!" Joe said.

McCartin moved impulsively towards us. But then, as he got closer, I could see a flicker of indecision in his eyes. Obviously there was something else on his mind that was worrying him more than we were. I wondered for a moment what it was.

The red beard showed golden highlights in the torch flames. "After you load your water, you leave. Tonight."

"The sooner the better," Joe said testily.

McCartin stared at us in surprise. He couldn't figure out what had

made such a radical change in our attitude.

Joe relaxed and waved at the torches on the beach. "What's all this?"

Sean was standing a little to the rear of us in the dark. He stepped up then, and said: " 'Tis a wake they're holding. That, and the thing we do when men are lost. For Ogra, the sea-spirit, that is."

McCartin's eyes opened wide, and his cheeks blew out in rage. "You! Go on with you. Get up to the house! This instant!"

Sean stared up at his father with a defiant expression and when McCartin moved toward him with a half-threatening swing of his big shoulders, the boy moved out of reach. Then he turned and began to go across the sand.

McCartin looked after his son, then turned and gazed at the torches stuck in the sand. "They're no better than pagans, none of them. Father Donnelly would never allow it, but he only gets out here twice a year."

McCartin looked at both of us, and then he moved off down the beach toward the cottage path. After a moment he was swallowed up in the gloom.

"Come on," Joe said. "Let's get back on board. I don't want to have to tangle with that creep again."

I started along after him, but then stopped, watching the activity on the beach. Some of the villagers were building bonfires on the shore. Others were moving toward the rowboats lined up at the edge of the water. They held torches as they climbed into the boats. From the cobblestone streets of the tiny village, groups of men moved toward me with the flaming torches held high in the air. The black smoke from them curled up into the night air.

"Somhairle!"

I jumped. It was Moira McCartin, standing beside me on the beach. She had approached me while I was concentrating on the ancient pageantry about me. I wondered why she had come.

"You're leaving," she said.

I nodded, feeling embarrassment. She had wanted to come with us. But we were sailing on such quick notice, I doubted if we could arrange for her to come along. Besides, I didn't like to think what would happen if Joe began getting any bright ideas with her on board.

"Yes, Moira," I said. "Unexpectedly. We must sail tonight. Before morning."

I saw her looking up at me with those beautiful eyes, and in the flickering torchlight I could see tears forming around their edges.

"You're going without me."

I swallowed. "To take you would cause complications," I said lamely. "I don't want to be responsible for what might happen to you."

"The skipper," she said with a low laugh. "You are afraid for me." She turned her head and looked off at the water in the harbor. Bright flashes of firelight danced in her hair. "But I can take care of myself."

I reached out and touched her shoulder. "Moira," I said softly. "It would not work. You do not know Captain Ryan. When it comes to women, he is a man without scruples. Do you understand what I am saying?"

She nodded. "And do you understand what I am saying? That I do not care?"

I felt the annoyance building in me. Against Joe Ryan who had taken every girl he'd ever wanted, this slip of a thing . . . ?

"Leave well enough alone, Moira," I said sharply. "Hear me?"

Her eyes flashed. She tossed back her head, and the red hair tumbled around her ears and throat. "I must go!" she said. "I'm begging you, on my knees, to take me with you! Can I do more."

I grasped both shoulders now and began shaking her. I was angry at her, angry at myself, and most of all angry at Joe who made the whole thing impossible. I don't know what I was going to say, because I never got the words formed. At that moment I felt myself seized roughly from the side and torn from her. I went sprawling in the sand, hitting hard on my spine.

I shook my head to clear it. Kevin McCartin had returned from the darkness, and was now towering over his daughter, his bristling red beard wild and unruly in the torchlight.

"Slut!" he yelled at her, jostling her roughly. "Lousy little slut! Just like your mother. Can't keep the smell of a man out of your nose! Get back to the house!"

The girl cowered there, brushing her hair back out of her eyes, holding herself away from him.

Outraged at her silence, McCartin drew back his hand and flung it, open-palmed, into her face. Moira fell back screaming, going out full length on the sand, the dress she was now wearing pulled up around her thighs. She crawled to her feet, digging at the sand around her, crying out, sobbing with her shame.

I sprang for McCartin's throat. I wanted to strangle the man. I wanted to tear out his vocal chords. I wanted to rip that damn red beard off his face hair by hair and listen to him scream.

But I never got the chance. He was waiting for me figuring I'd be just the fool I was. As I leaped, he side-stepped me, and hacked down

at my neck with his huge meathook of a hand. He slapped me into the sand, face first.

I came up spitting dried kelp and seashells. The big bastard was circling about, crouched, waiting for me to come at him again. I got to my feet warily and approached him. Both of us circled. I stepped closer and fainted at him. He didn't turn a hair.

By now the villagers were gathering in a disinterested circle, holding the torches high and watching us with flat, expressionless eyes. No one lifted a finger to help either one of us. I noticed that with sardonic delight. As for Moira, I heard her sobbing some distance off. I hoped she was all right.

I moved in again, drawing back my right arm for a roundhouse blow. The big man retreated a step, and held firm. Then I came around again, still moving in. McCartin took my cue and prepared to deliver a knockout punch to me. He stepped back with his right foot, swinging his arm for the blow.

It was a simple matter after that. What I did was to execute a more or less satisfactory Judo throw call *uki-goshi*. As McCartin swung his right arm to the rear and stepped back with his right foot. I moved rapidly toward him on my left foot, at the same time grabbing his left wrist with my right hand, and circling his waist under his upraised right arm with my left arm. We were hip to hip. I tightened myself to him, and rolled the big body over my left hip, turning to the right as I did so. McCartin wasn't familiar with the maneuver, and I toppled him over like a poleaxed steer.

He lay there stunned a moment, and a murmur of desultory approval came from the villagers standing nearby.

He shook himself doggedly, and rose slowly to his feet. But I wasn't alone now. As I waited for the big man to charge me, I was shouldered roughly aside from the rear, and Joe Ryan stepped up to face McCartin.

"Get up, McCartin," Joe said, "and beat it out of here! We've had enough trouble from you."

McCartin glanced across at me as he stumbled to his feet, and stared sullenly at Joe. Without another word he turned and vanished into the darkness.

I grinned at Joe. "You came just in time, pal."

Joe snorted. "You seemed to be doing all right, Sam." Then the yellow cat's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "What were you trying to do—prove yourself to that redheaded sea witch?"

I snorted and turned away, trying to get my breath. Moira was nowhere to be seen. Smart girl, I thought. But she'd better stay out of

her father's sight. He'd be rough when he caught up with her.

The villagers were now going about their tasks again on the shore line. Joe and I watched them. Already several of the rowboats were moving across the harbor from a left to right direction. In each boat two men carried torches, one in the bow, the other in the stern.

The leading boat was already halfway around the arc of a circle that would bring it back to shore across the harbor. The torch-bearer in the bow of the first boat was a dignified patriarch of the village, a leathery seaman with a strong, weathered face.

As the other boats fell into line behind him, he rose in the bow and held a crucifix up in his hand. Even from the shore the glittering reflection was plainly visible. He held it out in front of him, lifting his eyes to the skies.

Now, from around me, came the keening of the villagers' dirge. The sound of it swept out from the shore over the waters, and echoed back from the cliffs with an eerie hollow moan. Shivers ran up and down my spine. I could tell that Joe, standing beside me, was transfixed too, swept up in the haunting agony of human grief.

And then, suddenly, as we all watched, hypnotized by the unearthly flicker of the wavering torches, spell bound by the wailing, the piercing scream of a terrified youth in one of the boats cut through the sound. Everything stopped, abruptly.

For a frozen instant everyone in the harbor was silent, and there was no noise at all but the lapping of the water on the boat hulls. Then, in the vague torchlight, I could see a small figure rise in the third boat, and plunge a long heavy harpoon down into the water by the prow.

I glanced at Joe. He was frowning as he peered into the harbor. None of us could see anything more. All around the villagers craned forward, listening, looking.

As we gaped, curious and startled by the agonized shriek that now repeated itself, the sea lifted up under the flickering procession of funeral boats, and a form that was neither water nor earth nor human reared into the air, sending the third boat high on its stern and toppling it over.

Rooted to the spot, I stared at what seemed to be a huge, massive shape writhing out of the water. Men and boat now plunged down, and the sea water churned about, foaming and sizzling as the torches plunged into it.

I could see the outline of a huge body, some twenty feet high, searching for something. The young boy's scream sounded again, for the third time. The huge bulky shape turned in upon itself, slashing at the second boat with a huge tail, which now became visible to us for

the first time.

“My God!” I cried. “It’s huge! As big as a house!”

We ran down to the shore now. Around us the villagers surged, eyes wide, mouths open, crossing themselves mechanically as they watched the fantastic, unbelievable visitation.

I saw Sean dart in front of me, and then Moira came running in from the cliffside. McCartin lumbered over, his eyes wide and aghast. The dirge was finished. A heavy, suspenseful silence closed down over us.

Men in the water began screaming for help. Cries of “*Tarrthail, tarrthail*,” echoed in the harbor. The huge beast turned again, moving toward one of the swimming men. A boat sailed around in back of the big beast, and the torchlights in it cast the monster into profile. It was like some prehistoric saurian, a giant marine lizard of some kind left over from the Mesozoic era. I’d certainly never seen its like in any textbook.

The boats circled about now, headed for shore. I could see the monster loom up into the skies, looking around in curiosity, following the wavering lights with its beady eyes.

Sean McCartin danced up and down in front of me. “It’s Ogra!” he cried. “Ogra!”

Someone else took up the chant. Soon it was echoing all about us and the torches waved back and forth.

The monster moved to the nearest boat, reaching out for it with one of its upper limbs. At the end of the prehensile extremity were huge cleaning talons. It reached out with them, and closed on a boat. The boat was lifted and crushed like a toy in a baby’s bathtub.

The boatmen in another craft threw harpoons at the beast. But I could see the harpoons glance harmlessly off the tough, scaly hide.

But now another villager, a superior marksman, tried for the head. The harpoon hit close to the right eye and imbedded itself between the scales. The wound instantly sprouted blood and the monster reared back, dazed suddenly, and tried to shake out the sharp, barbed harpoon.

For a moment there was an awed silence.

Then the monster lifted its bleeding head and emitted a terrifying roar that bounded back earsplitting from the cliffs across the water. And as it roared, it moved forward, violently beating the water with its massive, powerful tail. It flung boats to the right and left, extinguishing the torches, battering the crafts to kindling wood. Men’s bodies ripped to pieces, smashed to shapeless flesh and bone by the power of the slapping tail, were tossed in all directions.

Now McCartin roared out, urging two of the villagers on. They were carrying rifles, and they started firing at the big beast.

“Shoot!” roared McCartin, “Shoot!”

Sean ran pell-mell across the sand, trying to stop them.

“No, father! No!”

McCartin cuffed the boy out of the way and the rifles began again.

Bullets had no effect on the beast. It roared and clawed with its massive talons at the flying slugs, as if it were swiping at a bothersome swarm of mosquitoes. It kept coming toward us.

Flipping its tail to the left and right, the monster scattered the remainder of the fleeing boats, and now the men, women and children on the beach began to run past us toward the shelter of the village. Joe and I pushed our way to the front, grabbing up large brands from the bonfire, waving them toward the beast.

Some of the more able-bodied villagers got the idea, and began manipulating their own torches. I glimpsed Sean standing in the sand, frozen, fascinated, and not joining in. The look on his face was strangely sympathetic, a look of anguish. I couldn’t see Moira at all.

We waved the torches at the huge beast as it leered at us from the edge of the surf. It thrust its head with the beady little red eyes down towards us, studying us curiously, like the ants we seemed to be. I could feel the hot stink of its breath as the immense head came closer. I fell back a bit, and so did those about me.

Then Joe tossed his torch at the beast’s head. It hit the monster square on the wounded eye. Bellowing in pain, it let out a roar of anguish, as much as of anger, gush from its cavernous throat.

Other torches followed Joe’s, and finally I let mine arc up at the beast’s head. Flames leaped off the monster’s scales, but did it no harm. The monster gazed at us all in a pathetic, wistful way, as if it did not know why it was being attacked, and then it turned and headed for the water. As it did so, it scattered the embers of a large bonfire, sending flames flying in all directions with a flick of its tail.

The monster lumbered to the surf, slid into the water and vanished under the smooth inky surface.

We stood immobilized for a long time afterward, trying to steady our nerves. But after the beast’s disappearance, there wasn’t a single ripple on the water.

“Good Lord, let’s get out of here.” Joe whispered.

I couldn’t have said it better myself.

Chapter 5

There wasn't much sleep aboard the *Triton* for any of us during what remained of the night, and we were hard at work on deck by early morning. I've never wanted to get out of a place so fast in my life. I had only one twinge of regret. I'd decided it would be best to forget about Moira. With McCartin ready to rip anybody to pieces who even glanced at her, I figured it wouldn't do to provoke him. He'd only take it out on her.

We'd been working no more than a quarter of an hour when we heard a loud commotion on the beach. I could see a group of McCartin's divers moving toward the dock. And right in back of them, gesticulating and angry, puffed Kevin McCartin himself.

Joe and I jumped onto the dock and met the group. A stubble-bearded young man stepped forward and approached Joe. McCartin stood back, glowering at us.

"We'll be wanting passage on your ship, Mister," the young man said. He glanced around at McCartin sullenly. "When His Nibs gets around to giving us our pay."

McCartin moved around quickly and faced the group. "Now hold on, you men. You'll get your pay, if you like. But there'll be no taking passage on any ships!"

"Why not?" Joe asked.

McCartin whirled on us. "For God's sake, Ryan!" He started to frame his words, and then he frowned at the men hovering near him. He grimaced. "Come on over to the house, you two. I want to talk to you."

Joe winked at me covertly. "Why not?"

The divers stayed on the dock while we followed McCartin. I saw Sean regarding us from a window of the cottage. I didn't catch sight of Moira, but I had the feeling she was watching, also.

We went into the cottage and closed the door behind us. McCartin faced us looking surprisingly worried.

"Let's lay our cards on the table, gentlemen," he said, beginning to pace up and down in front of his microscope and assaying equipment. "The whole thing'll go smash if they leave. All my divers. My Boatmen. The lot of them!"

I grinned wryly. "I kind of see their point."

Joe's yellow eyes gleamed. "You got any special reason you don't

want them to leave?"

McCartin's beard bristled. "What do you mean?"

Joe reached in his pocket and took out the three gold coins that had fallen from the dead diver's pouch. He showed them to McClartin.

"Like, maybe you don't want them to talk too much?"

McCartin's face flushed. He moved back a bit, his lips tight, his fists clenched. He spoke in a strangled voice. "Where did you get those?"

Joe's teeth glinted, and his lips pulled tight in a wolf's grin. "The same place you did." He put the coins carefully back in his pocket. I could see the calculating look in his eyes, and I knew he was ready to sink the shaft. "Suppose we could get rid of that thing out there? Joe said.

"The beast in the harbor? You think you can?" McCartin was startled.

Joe rubbed the side of his chin. "Maybe." I could see his eyes move across to the far door, the door to the store room. "Let's take another look in there," he said softly.

McCartin's eyes riveted on Joe's face. Then he wheeled abruptly, pulled the door open and we went in.

Joe pointed to the safe. "Open it up."

McCartin swelled and his face turned red. "Not on your bloody tintype! Look here, I've stood about enough of you!"

Joe shrugged elaborately, looking at me, nodding.

"Okay. I guess we can always make a few bucks for ourselves taking those diving birds back where they came from."

McCartin looked first at Joe and then at me, and bit his lip. Moving quickly, he spun the dial and flipped open the safe door. He stood back so we could see. Inside was a king's ransom in gold coins and gold chalices studded with precious stones. A fortune in salvage. I could feel the itch in my own palm. Joe had drawn to a bobtailed flush—and won! But he wasn't through yet. He was still as cool as a December morning.

"Nice," he grinned, reaching in. He picked out the biggest of the gleaming chalices. He brought it out, hefted it, admired it and showed it to me. "How about this, Sam, for a little down payment? You like?"

I tried to keep a straight face. "Not bad."

McCartin ground his teeth in rage. "You're out of your mind! A thing like that is priceless! And how do you think you're going to dispose of it? This stuff belongs to the government!"

Joe's mouth thinned to a tight little grin. "I'll bet you had some way figured. And if you did, so can we!"

McCartin advanced on Joe, his hands moving convulsively, "Filthy blackmailer!"

Joe dodged aside, and backhanded him savagely in the mouth. McCartin staggered, more surprised than hurt.

"We'll get your beast for you," Joe said. "But mind your lip!"

McCartin put his handkerchief to his bleeding lip and glowered at Joe.

"You're getting off easy friend. After all, you've in no spot to squawk, even if we grabbed the whole thing. Milking the government, holding out on them, for fifteen years?"

McCartin rubbed his cheek. "I've been here fifteen years, yes. But I didn't locate that wreck until two years ago. I'm merely accumulating this stuff for the proper time."

Joe laughed harshly. "I'll bet. The proper time for taking it on the lam!"

McCartin slammed the safe shut, and glared at us. "When will you start?"

"Now," Joe said. "Why not?"

We left McCartin eating his heart out, and went down the slope to the path. When we'd turned the bend away from the house, we found Sean and Moira waiting for us in the path.

"Mr. Ryan," Sean said.

Joe wasn't looking at Sean. He was looking hungrily at Moira. His cheek twitched. I felt a sudden surge of anger, but caught myself before I moved on him.

"Call me Joe, kid." Joe was staring at Moira.

Sean's eyes were big with pleading. "You'll be trying to catch him? Ogra?"

"Yeah Sean," Joe said, reaching out and tousling the boy's hair. "Stick around for a good show."

"No!" It was Moira who spoke now, her sea-green eyes alarmed. She darted a glance at me, then faced Joe.

"You can't!"

Joe's face lit up. "You're worried!" He turned to me. "She's concerned over me, Sam!"

A flush crept into the girl's cheeks. "No," she said quickly. "But 'tis a bad thing you're doing. I do not worry about you. I worry for all of us. The world . . ." Her voice trailed off.

Joe grinned. "I don't get it."

" 'Tis a manifestation of evil," Moira said rapidly. "Don't you see? 'Tis the monster of the devil, making its appearance on earth to warn

us all of the cataclysm. We have a saying: *Nuair atá tú go sóúil fulaíng thú féin*. Do you understand what I am saying? Leave well enough alone. Heed the warning. Do not tempt the devil.”

“Don’t catch the monster?” Joe grinned. “Is that what you’re saying?”

“Yes,” Moira whispered. “Or it will be the death of us all. Mark my words.”

With a glance at me, she turned abruptly from us and vanished around the rock outcrop. Sean glanced at us briefly and followed her.

I didn’t say anything until we hit the beach. “What about all that? She’s no dummy, you know. She may have something.”

“Superstitious hogwash!” Joe snapped. “Now, how the hell do we catch it? With the shark net? And how do we kill a thing that flicks off harpoons like toothpicks?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “Dynamite?”

Joe’s eyes glinted suddenly. “Sam,” he mused. “You ever think how much that thing could be worth to us—*alive*.”

I could almost see him counting the greenbacks. And somehow, even though I’m no angel myself, and I’d run guns to the Cubans with Joe, and smuggled contraband, I felt a shiver run up and down my spine. I somehow felt there was something inherently *evil* in everything that touched this operation. Or maybe I just had a powerful imagination.

Once we started working on the shark net, however, I forgot my twinges of apprehension, and plunged into the deckside activity. We’d finished with our repairs at the dock, and steamed out about a half mile to sea. It was here that we were rigging the big net.

We had our two giant booms out over the side, running steel cables from dead-end snatch-blocks on deck, up through the blocks on the booms, and back to the winch. From these cables we hung the huge steel net, and watched Jack Finn at the winch as he slowly lowered the shark net down into the water.

Joe and I put the finishing touches to the bathysphere operation. I’d rigged the cable of the ’sphere to a small boom, and had it in position to lower over the side. I was ready to climb into the ’sphere now. Joe and I had flipped a coin, and I won.

The ’sphere was a good idea, really. We’d decided the best was to flush out the monster was to attract it with a light of some kind. And the ’sphere has illumination inside, and powerful movable spots outside. That would bring out the beast, if anything would.

“Okay, Boats?” Joe called to Jack Finn.

Finn nodded.

Joe turned to me, and stuck out his hand. "Luck, kid."

I grinned and stepped inside the 'sphere. The heavy door clanged shut with a shudder, and I instantly felt the oppressive claustrophobia I always experience once I'm inside the damned thing. It's always the same feeling a professional actor get just before going on stage every night. I'll never get over it, either.

I put on the earphones and blew into the speaker phone. "Am I coming through, Joe?"

"Loud and clear," Joe said, his voice filtered and electronic and unnatural in the headset.

"I'm ready to dive if you are."

I could feel the gentle hum of the big deck winch as it started up, and then I could feel myself suspended slightly in the air, free from the rocking solidity of the deck. Up we went, until the bathysphere cleared the rails. Then I felt myself swing out over the ocean. Now I went down, and it was dark as the water closed over me.

I stood at the view plate and watched the water as I continued into the depths. It grew darker and I could feel the murky weight of the sea close in over me. I switched the interiors on and was instantly bathed in a glow of artificial yellow light.

"Give me about fifteen fathoms, Joe," I said into the phone. "Then I'll tell you."

Groups of fish swirled by, peering in at me, as the outer regions grew even darker. I saw the bulging eyes and protruding snout of a black grouper as it nosed around my view plate, and then it lazily swam off and disappeared. I flipped the exterior spotlight on, and the big beams cut into the water around me. The nature of the sea changed gradually down here. The life was of a different type. Light was an unknown thing. I could feel animal eyes staring at me, wondering what I was.

"Fifteen fathoms," Joe's voice crackled in the ear phones.

"Okay. Hold it."

I moved the exterior spotlight about. I could see nothing unusual.

"Give me slow engines, Joe. Four or five knots. Head her down the bay."

After a moment I felt a slight tremor on the cable holding the bathysphere, and then I began moving along through the water, tilted at a slight angle.

"Where are we, Joe?" I asked.

"Just off the point."

I kept the lights moving, and flushed out a few strange undersea fish, but nothing interesting. And then, about ten minutes after I'd

been down, the big beam of light seemed to lift out something huge, vague, and ill-defined—a shadow in the dark, just beyond the range of the lights.

“Joe! Stop engines!”

I saw it! I saw it coming slowly out of the darkness into the light. It had seen me, and it was attracted to the light. It was not moving fast, but it was prowling about, confused, its tremendous reptilian head swaying back and forth in the water. But it kept moving toward me.

“Christ! It’s here. Stand by with that net!” I yelled.

I could see the big head now, and the gleaming red eyes studying the ‘sphere. It extended its head then, somewhat like a fish investigating a lure. And when it did I could feel the tremendous power of the huge body movements. The ‘sphere moved slightly, like a swaying pendulum. The huge, scaly, green face pressed up to the view plate, and I could almost *feel* the monster’s slimy, rubbery, tough-plated hide.

“Take me up,” I said cautiously into the phone. “But not too fast. I don’t want to lose him.”

Just as I spoke, I knew it was too late. The big head reared back, and then it darted right at the ‘sphere; the beast’s jaws opened wide. The mouth wouldn’t swallow the bathysphere, I told myself nervously. It couldn’t swallow me! But I was sweating and shaking. It looked in at me, puzzled. Then I felt the whole bathysphere shudder and lurch about. I realized what had happened. It had clapped one of its great talons over the ‘sphere to steady it, and was gnawing at the metal with its mouth. I thought ludicrously of a puppy trying to get his mouth around a tennis ball that was too big for it.

I went down to my knees as the monster chewed at the big bathysphere, flicking it about in the water. I could see through the view plate now, and the powerful beam of the spotlight showed redness and fleshy pulp. I was looking right down the monster’s open throat!

“Pull up! Pull up!” I shouted at the speaker phone.

The bathysphere trembled, jerked, heaved up, swayed and rotated. I couldn’t keep my footing. I was being bounced from side to side of the ‘sphere. The monster’s inner mouth covered the view plate now, and I could hear the terrible sounds of steel tearing and rivets snapping and bolts shearing.

I was on the floor of the ‘sphere and a jetting stream of water suddenly spurted in through a wide crack at the seam.

“For God’s sake, Joe! Pull! Pull!”

The water was spraying all over me, and I couldn’t stop it. I was

wallowing in it now. It poured in faster as the seam widened. The monster was tearing the 'sphere to pieces with its powerful jaws.

I knew it couldn't be long now. I grabbed the phone again.

I don't know how many seconds elapsed, but I do know that after a moment the 'sphere stopped its agitation and hung limply in the water. Then the spotlight picked out the monster, and I clambered to my feet. I stood hip deep in water now, yelling frantically to be hauled up.

I started to move. And as I did so the spotlight from the 'sphere caught the monster. I could see that the shark net had descended over its back. And the monster reacting to the new enemy, had slashed at it with a powerful talon, letting go of me.

The monster was shaking the claw, trying to get it loose from the net. It was caught tight.

The monster, anxious now, swiped at the net with its other talon, and became entangled from both sides.

"Snug up! Snug up the net!" I cried into the phone. "We've got him!"

Now, as I moved up through the water, I could see the net turning in around the monster, tightening up like a string purse. The monster was hopelessly entangled now, fighting frantically in a losing battle.

I felt the welcome relief of swift ascent. It was only a few moments before I climbed out of the 'sphere, shaken to the core, and saw that the fight was just getting under way on deck.

Jack Finn was working the winch. Joe was supervising the operation from the rail. Just as I climbed into dry clothes, I saw the huge net emerge from the water with the madly struggling monster inside.

"Swing her in!" Joe cried.

The boom moved the big monster in toward the deck and Joe yelled out: "Get ready with the shackle bolts!"

Crewmen leaped to execute his orders, pulling tight on the cable running through the shackle bolts and attached on the deck to rim bolts. As they pulled in tightly, the netted monster was secured to the deck, enmeshed in its flexible steel prison.

We had caught the monster of Nara!

Chapter 6

It didn't take long for the news to get out. Nara was a lighthouse island, and it had a government radio tower. By nightfall the news was all over the world. I caught a radio broadcast in my bunk that night after dinner.

"Headlines of the entire world are being monopolized today by news of the capture of a fantastic sea monster, seemingly of prehistoric origin, off the coast of Ireland," the announcer trumpeted.

"Puzzled scientists are already speculating that the monster may have been released from some vast sub-oceanic cavern far beneath the earth's crust, by unprecedented volcanic eruptions which occurred in the area recently.

"Some scientific authorities, however, are suggesting that the whole thing is no more than an elaborate Irish hoax. Nevertheless, the Irish government is sending two of its top paleontologists to claim the creature for Ireland." The broadcaster's voice turned sardonic. "If it *does* exist."

I snapped off the set and grinned. It existed all right. I heard Joe snort disgustedly at the end of my bunk. He had come in and caught the last of the announcer's words.

"Listen to that damn crap!" he said. "That's people for you. Never believe anything until it's shoved down their throats."

I sat up on the bunk. "What's next Joe? What do we do with our catch now?"

Joe ground his teeth and cursed. "That radio operator up on the cliff sent the news out too fast. We've got to sweat it out right here until the government people show up. If we don't, they'll make it tough as hell for us to show it anywhere."

I groaned. "All that work—and nothing for it."

"We'll get ours, Sam, I promise it," Joe said grimly.

His eyes were slitted and I did not like the look in them.

"I hope something works out," I grumbled.

Joe turned and headed for the corridor outside the bunk. "I'm going to hit the sack," he said. "In the morning we can get things moving."

"*Oíche mhaith agat!*" I said. "Good night," I grinned. "I'm picking up the language fast."

"Sounds like good shark bait at that," Joe said with a leer.

I sat there a moment, yawning and thinking. I had been a long haul

with Joe Ryan. I couldn't say I particularly liked him, but he was tough, and plenty handy with himself. He was a fighter who usually got what he wanted.

We'd served in Korea together, and that's where I'd learned diving and salvage. I'd never had any particular aim in life, and looked up Joe down in Texas where he was working on the Gulf in a greasy sack salvage operation. We worked together a while, and then a sleazy little Cuban named Josérito Fernandez got us onto a real good thing—bringing in shipments of arms to the rebels in Oriente Province, before Castro took over. We got zeroed in a couple times, and almost had our decks shot out from under us once, but we made out.

With the dough we couped from that operation, we bought the salvage rig and the bathysphere, and started out on our own. Once in a while we hit, but never really big. We had come up to the Irish coast to try for some of the convoy kills during World War II, and had just found a likely one when the big volcanic eruption took place. So here we were again, high and dry, without one cent in the bank, and a monster chained to the deck, ready to eat us all for breakfast.

Hell, there was no use brooding about it. We were hard-working guys who had never made it. Sometime we would. And when we did, so help me God, would live it up big!

I snagged a cigarette out of the pack, lit up, and went for a breather on deck. The stars were shining and it was a beautiful, clear night. I strolled to the foredeck where the monster was netted and chained down. A bright deck-light, located aft of the monster, was turned full on him, throwing the rest of the deck into shadows. A canvas canopy was rigged above the beast to keep the sun off its back during the day, and we had one of the ship's fire hoses playing a stream of water on it from above. This water was trailing over the deck and draining out into the harbor through the scuppers.

We figured it as best to keep the big thing wet. It was a sea beast, there was no doubt of that, yet it seemed partially amphibious. And it seemed to be doing all right so far. It had almost achieved a kind of resignation about its captivity. This helped morale on board ship, believe me. With that thing flailing about, God knows who we could get to ship with us.

The monster was hunched over now, dozing. I could see its green body, with the plated metallic scales and its gleaming water soaked skin. And then, as I stood there, I had surprised to see the monster suddenly raise its head as though it had heard or sensed the presence of something on deck.

It wasn't looking at me. It was looking back the other way, toward the bow of the ship. Now, rising under its huge net, it turned slowly

toward the shadowed area on the other side. I tried to squint into the darkness myself, but I could see nothing.

Then, before I could move, I saw someone come out from behind a tarpaulin lashed over some oil drums. It was Sean McCartin! I was just about to jump forward and throw him off the ship when I saw Moira, moving furtively and cautiously across the deck behind him. What the hell?

I was curious to make a move and tip my hand. I wanted to see what they had up their sleeves. Was this some kind of superstitious sacrifice to Ogra? The two of them crouched in front of the monster's big head, staring up at it. The monster looked at them, silent contemplative.

"Fáilte romhat!" murmured Sean. I recognized the words. "Welcome." Sean spoke the words with respect. Beside him Moira bowed her head in obeisance.

The monster rumbled and shook the net, but the two of them did not jump back. They looked at each other, and then I saw Sean cross over to the nearest shackle bolt which held the cable binding the net. He bent over and tried to loosen it.

Moira peered about the deck, seemingly keeping a lookout for her brother. The monster turned then, shifting its stance so it faced the boy; it towered above Sean and edged forward against the confines of the steel net. Sean shook the shackle bolt again.

I moved then, starting to come out from behind the deck light. But before I could say anything the monster struck with its huge talon. The blow did not catch Sean, but the net swung out, and its force knocked him to the deck. Moira cried out and jumped to him to pick him up.

At that instant, while I charged across the deck myself, the monster raised its huge talon again, and struck downward, now thoroughly aroused. The sharp, lethal edge of it grazed Moira's body, not tearing her flesh, but ripping her shirt and dungarees down the side like a huge razor.

Sean rolled out of range of the monster, and Moira was shaking with terror when I reached her and gathered her to me. Now the monster was roaring and snarling slashing at the net with its talons.

"What do you think you're doing?" I yelled at Moira. "You'll be killed!"

Now a voice called from the darkness beyond the deck light. I could recognize Jack Finn's husky basso.

"What's going on out there?"

"We've got it under control, Boats!" I called. "You can sit tight."

For a moment I froze there, cursing soundlessly. I didn't want any trouble with Joe. If he knew these two members of the clan McCartin had come aboard, he'd have them keel-hauled. I was still holding the girl tightly, waiting for an okay from the Bos'n.

"Long as it's under control, Mr. Slade."

"Forget it."

I heard his footsteps moving away on the deck.

I looked at Sean. "You hurt?"

The boy was shivering. "No, sir."

I faced Moira. Her eyes were bright and wide and dilated. "How about you?"

I realized then that I was still holding her body tightly to mine, protectively. She looked into my eyes, and then away with embarrassment. She let her hands stray down from my chest, and I drew my arms from around her soft, yielding body. I felt a stir within me, and I backed away deliberately.

"I'm—all right," she said, her voice shaken. She looked down at herself, and in her modesty, pulled the ripped clothing closer around her. I could see part of her naked breast, and almost all of one long leg. I looked away.

"You two get off this boat fast," I said in a low urgent tone. "How'd you get here anyway?"

Moira stared at me defiantly, ignoring my question.

"You needn't look that way at him, Somhairle. 'Twas my own idea. This monster you've caught will only bring trouble to us all."

"Sure enough, if you keep trying to get close to him! He'll oblige you with a full-scale clawing!"

She bit her lip. Then she faced me again. "We rowed out here, if you must know. And we'll try again until we succeed."

I shook my head in resignation. "I have a feeling you will at that," I said. "Come on!"

"Come on where?" she asked me with a toss of her gorgeous red hair.

"I'm rowing you back to the beach."

"Sure and we can row ourselves, Somhairle," she snapped, turning to her brother. She took him by the hand. "Come on, Sean. We're finished here, for the time being."

And the two of them hurried to the rail, Moira all the time clutching the shreds of her shirt to cover her nakedness.

"Hold it!"

I came after them.

“And now what would you be wanting?” she asked impudently.

“I’m going with you. I want to be sure you *get* to the beach.”

Moira chuckled then, her face breaking into an amused smile. “ ’Tis a determined man you are at that, Somhairle.”

I helped them over the side, and we climbed down to the rowboat tied up there. We rowed in silence across the calm harbor, until we had reached the beach. Sean jumped out and tugged the prow up onto the sand.

“Okay, Sean, beat it. I intend to have words with your sister. You hear me?”

Sean looked questioningly at Moira. She gave him imperceptible nod, and then the boy turned and started loping across the beach to the cliff trail.

I helped Moira out of the boat. “Now would you like to explain to me exactly what you were trying to do?”

She turned to me and stared at me as if I were daft. “But to set him free, of course. ’Tis Ogra, the sea god. Did you not know that?”

I shook my head. “Frankly, it looks to me like some prehistoric link between the dinosaur age and ours.”

“Scientific nonsense,” said Moira, sniffing. “You sound just like my stubborn father.”

We walked along the beach and sat down in a spot under the cliffs, sheltered and cut off from the village.

“Your father is an educated man,” I said after awhile. “How did he ever come to devote his whole life to this desolate island? Nara doesn’t even show on most maps.”

She smiled secretly. “Haven’t you guessed? ’Tis a simple thing after all. He was a brilliant archeologist, and he took a fine job with the Irish government. But he was always like he is now. Never could get along with other people. They finally sent him off to this desolate island where he didn’t have to get along with anyone, to study the Viking and Irish wrecks. Fifteen years ago it was, and he’s been here ever since.”

“You’ve never been off the island?”

“Never since,” she breathed, staring out to sea. My eyes were growling accustomed to the darkness, and I could see her profile, the lively red hair flowing down her neck, the strong clean cut of her nose, the line of her lips, the upthrust of her breasts against what was left of her shirt. There was even a gleaming patch of her milk-white skin, visible through the torn garment, and the gentle curve of her left breast which I could not help seeing. I pulled my eyes away from her, and looked once again at the masts bobbing up and down in the

harbor. It seemed a much safer view to observe.

"This is no place for a girl like you."

She smiled. "What do you mean, like me?"

I looked in her eyes. She was watching me with amusement, with the arch look of a natural-born flirt, with the look of someone who wanted to be a woman but who had never had the chance to be.

"You should have men crawling at your feet, Moira. They would, you know, if there were any around here." I touched her chin and lifted her face. The stars twinkled in her eyes.

"There are men, Somhairle," she whispered. "The divers. The villagers who work for my father."

"Not the men you should have, Moira," I said, moving closer to her. "You should have princes, kings, men of wealth and power, and they would sit at your feet and tell you of your beauty and your charm."

" 'Tis the Blarney Stone you've kissed, Somhairle, that much is obvious to me." But her lips were wide and smiling and parted, and her teeth showed as she whispered.

"Who would kiss the Blarney Stone, Princess, if he had your lips to kiss?" I leaned and touched her lips with mine. They were cool and calm and she closed her eyes and we stayed together for a long moment. Then she drew her head away.

"Somhairle," she said, and the sound came from deep in her throat, blurred and husky. "That was nice."

"Very," I said, and I kissed her again. My arm slid around her shoulders now, and she turned slightly to me. Her lips moved against mine, and I could feel their growing warmth. The flesh of her body pressed against me, and though we were sitting side by side, we turned to each other, breast to breast. Her head went back slightly, and her hair fell down over my hand and wrist.

After a long time, I drew back. "That was wonderful, Princess. Princess Nara." I laughed.

"Oh, Somhairle!" she cried, and flung her arms around my neck, pulling me tightly to her this time, her lips clinging to mine, moving against mine, with awakened desire. Now her body moved in to mine, fitting itself curve to curve, to my own. She writhed under me, pulling me over on top of her, until I was face to face with her on the sand, and she was clinging to me with her warm, soft, aroused body. She was like a flower opening for the first time.

She had carried that body with her for twenty years, and she had thought she knew herself. But now she had suddenly learned that she did not know her body at all, nor what it yearned for, and she was more amazed at what it now told her, than she had ever been in her

life.

“Moirá,” I murmured, tearing myself away from her lips for a moment. She lay there in the sand, looking up at me, her sea-green eyes slanted and oriental in the starlight. She gazed at me along her dark lashes, and her hair lay on the sand about her head, framing it like a halo.

In our embrace my hand had pulled at the shirt on her back, sliding it down over one creamy shoulder. Now, as I looked down at her, I was conscious only of the fact that the shreds of the shirt had parted over her breasts, and that one of them lay completely exposed, its white softness before my eyes. She saw my glance and she looked at me and smiled.

“Kiss me, Somhairle,” she said softly, and as she closed her eyes I leaned down and I kissed her. A tremor shot through her body. She moved in the sand beneath me. She thrust her head back away from me, her fingernails digging into my back.

Then I touched her breast with my hand, and she closed her eyes, moaned softly and turned her head from me. The flaming red hair moved against my nose, tickling it. The smell of the fresh air came to me. It permeated my entire body.

“Somhairle,” she whispered, as I held her there in a tight embrace. “I love you, Somhairle.”

I closed my eyes. It wasn’t fair. This lonely, woodland kid, who had never even seen a man like me before, thinking she was in love with me. It was one of those obscene, miserable things and I felt sick.

“No, you don’t,” I said. “You just think you do.”

“Yes,” she said. “It is the truth. I have asked my heart, and my heart has given me the answer.”

I lifted her mouth to mine and kissed her again.

“You see,” she said, looking into the sky beyond my head, “when you kiss me there is the ringing of bells in the air. There is soft music of the little people. There is the far-off singing of many voices. It is you I want, Somhairle. No one else. I know. A woman always knows.”

I held her to me, trying to forget what a slob and bastard I was to get her into a situation like this.

But she would have none of my excuses.

“Take me, Somhairle,” she whispered. “I demand to be taken.” She clutched my hand in hers and I pressed her body, warm and quivering, to mine. Somehow I found the button to the dungarees she wore, and unbuttoned them, and slipped the clothes off her trembling flesh until there was nothing between us but the warmth of our bodies.

She strained and twisted and clutched at me in the ecstasy of her stabbing, tearing pain, and with the unfeigned sincerity of innocence, she abandoned herself to me. And for me it was like dying and being reborn. It was a dizzying climb to a cloud of ecstasy such as I'd never experienced before.

When the tumult and madness between us finally subsided, we lay there, breathless and sated and content, surrounded by the essence and magic of our love.

Moirra's soft, flame-red hair flicked across my face, and I opened my eyes. She was bending over me, her lips brushing my lips, her full, firm breasts teasing the flesh of my chest. I pulled her to me and desire swept through me again like that wild storm at sea.

"Moirra!" I whispered hoarsely.

"Somhairle!" Her tongue was at my ear.

Then I rose to one elbow, my face flaming, my tongue dry. I sprang to my feet, and I turned to her, my eyes dry. I sprang to my feet, and I turned to her, my eyes blurred and hot. I snatched my shirt and pants and moved off down the beach hastily.

She sprang up to follow me. "Somhairle!" she cried in agony. "What have I done?"

"Nothing," I said. "It's what *I've* done."

"What have I said?"

I turned to her, my heart pounding. "It's *me*, Moirra! I'm no good! I'm a lousy no-good son of a bitch, Moirra! Do you understand that? It's what I did to you. You need a decent guy, a good man, Moirra! Not me. Now get away. You make me sick!"

She staggered back from me as if I had struck her. "Sick?" she repeated, holding her hand to her mouth in despair. "I make you sick. When you mean all the world to me?"

I clutched at something invisible in the air between us. I had no idea what it might be.

"Sick!" I repeated.

"Somhairle!" she sobbed, and threw herself at me, grasping me around the shoulders, hugging me to her naked body as if her flesh would bring me back to her. "Hold me, Somhairle! You don't mean it!"

I ripped her from me, sent her reeling against the sand. "I do! Leave me alone! It's my misery now!"

She stood up again and stared at me, wonderingly, forlornly. "What did I do, Somhairle?" Tears glistened in her eyes.

How could I tell her that she had done nothing but love me, the finest thing in the world she could do? How could I tell her that it was

my own shame that was angering me, for loving her? How could I tell her that I was not lying, that I *was* sick, that I could never love anyone pure and good and real like her.

The black waves of remorse rose before me and I stood alone in a black, empty void, and I was blinded by self-loathing. I slapped her face without seeing her. I heard her stagger back into the sand. She lay there sobbing out my name. She wept heart-brokenly like a child who had just been senselessly punished.

I turned on my heel and stalked off through the night.

Part Two:

GORG0

Chapter 7

Two Paleontologists from the University of Dublin showed up early the next morning, landing in a government seaplane in the harbor. Nara didn't have a large enough flat spot to accommodate a land plane.

We watched Kevin McCartin's launch chug out to pick them up. After a short confab in the launch, which Joe and I watched with great interest through the ship's binoculars, McCartin grudgingly started up the launch and headed for the *Triton*.

We helped the three of them aboard, shook hands all around, made appropriately veiled comments to McCartin, and then led the newcomers to the monster's net.

One of the Dubliners was named Flaherty, the other one O'Brien. Professor Marius Flaherty was a tweedy man in his forties who smoked a pipe and took it out occasionally to move his lips in and out and ponder inexpressible thoughts. Professor Desmond O'Brien was a curly-headed, sandy-haired cherub with a baby's face who smoked a cigar and rarely said a word.

They studied the monster from all angles, muttering to themselves, peering with interest at the scaly plates, the huge, sharp talons, and the green luminescent color of the beast.

Flaherty took a notebook from his tweed jacket and made marks in it, while he squinted through the wire mesh. Frankly, if I'd been the monster. I'd have been dammed embarrassed at all the attention. I'd have shaken the net just a bit, I think, to throw a scare into them. But our monster didn't move a scale. After a few minutes of this, Flaherty moved to where Joe and I stood watching. McCartin glowered at us.

"I've been saying to my colleague, Captain Ryan, this is almost unbelievable!" Flaherty took the pipe out and pressed his lips together. "I wonder if you realize the enormous scientific value of this discovery."

Joe grinned and looked at me. "Why, I think we do, Professor Flaherty."

Putting the pipe back into his mouth, Flaherty turned and gazed across the foredeck at the huge shape tied down in the shark net. "Incredible!" He turned to Joe. "Well, then I shall wireless the University of Dublin at once to make proper preparations to receive the animal."

Joe nodded. "I see."

I didn't quite like the tone of Joe's voice. It seemed as if he was laughing under his breath, as if Flaherty and O'Brien and all this folderol over the beast was a source of some hidden amusement. I was worried. I wondered if the excitement of the catch had unnerved him and jiggled some screw loose. I didn't get it. Not at all.

"You will proceed, then Captain Ryan, to Dublin," Flaherty said. The gray eyes behind the thick glasses rested momentarily on Joe's hatchet-thin face and flat lips. "Naturally, compensation will be forthcoming for your services."

Joe gestured negligently. "Oh, sure."

I couldn't believe my ears. Joe, so casual about money?

"My colleague and I," Flaherty said, turning and waving a hand at the curly-headed cherub behind him, "will meet you at the harbor." Then he paused and gazed at both Joe and me. "Unless, of course, you'd like to have one of us go with you."

"Very good," Flaherty said, as if everything was settled. "Now, sir. One thing. The animal's skin should be kept wet with water. It is an amphibious reptile, but we don't understand too much about it. It will be best to keep a continuous stream on its back, just as you have been doing. I congratulate you on your intelligence and forethought." He looked vaguely at the distant horizon, considering. "When do you intend to sail, Captain?"

"Tonight," said Joe. There wasn't a flicker of expression on his face. "That is," he went on, "if it's okay with you."

Joe? Asking this egghead if it was okay with him? I couldn't believe my ears.

"Excellent," Flaherty said, nodding and beaming. "The sooner the better."

He stuck out his hand.

"Well, then. We shall expect you within a few days."

We shook hands all around again and watched them depart. As soon as they had cleared our decks, I turned to Joe.

"All right, Joe," I said. "Out with it. What's cooking?"

He turned an innocent face to me. "What are you talking about?"

I could see that whatever it was, Joe wasn't going to confide in me. At least, not right now.

I shrugged. "Okay. Keep it to yourself. I just hope it isn't one of your sneaky little deals that's going to backfire on us again!"

Joe grinned, clapping me on the back. "Have I ever let you down, Sam, Old boy?"

"No, not completely," I said. "And now's not the time to start."

He watched me as I moved away from him. I was mad and he knew it. Whatever it was he had up his sleeve, I hoped he could handle it.

I went below for a cup of coffee in the galley, and as I was drinking from the warm china mug I glanced out the starboard porthole. I was astonished to see two people rowing vigorously toward us in one of those hide-covered island boats call a "curragh." The energetic oarsmen were Sean and Moira McCartin!

I hurried on deck just as they had climbed aboard and stood inside the rail arguing with Jack Finn.

"Okay, Boats, I'll take care of this," I said, coming up fast.

Finn turned to me, pulling at his cigarette and studying me curiously with his blue eyes. "Okay, Mr. Slade. It's your party."

And he touched his cap and backed off.

"What are you two little fools doing on board the *Triton*!" I asked angrily. "Get ashore at once! I don't want Ryan to see you. Jump to it!"

Moira shook her head, her chin tilted high, her eyes hard with determination. "Not until you promise to let the beast go."

"Now listen here, you two!" I snapped. "I'm sick and tired of all this nonsense! I was fool enough to put up with you two last night, but if Captain Ryan finds out, he'll flog you to within an inch of your lives!"

"Partners, you are, is it not? Moira asked slyly in a singsong voice, her beautiful eyes working me over calculatingly.

"So?"

"Then the responsibility's as much yours as it is his," she said triumphantly. "It wouldn't do to have human blood on your hands, now would it, Mr. Slade?"

"Joe's the boss," I said. "We're partners, but he's the boss. There can be only one captain on a ship."

"Then 'tis him we shall have to see," shrugged Moira. "If you will be telling him."

I moved around in front of her to block her path. "If Joe ever dreamed you had come aboard this ship last night and tried to free the monster, he'll kill you! Believe me! It's a serious matter with him. Now get out of here before you have real trouble!"

" 'Tis here I'm staying till I see him!" Moira said adamantly, shaking her head.

I longed to take her over my knee and paddle the daylights out of her. But she was a bit too big for that sort of thing. And I didn't think I could bring myself to do it, anyway.

I turned to Sean, to see if I could find reason there. "What's wrong

with you two? This monster is a prehistoric discovery that may aid science immeasurably. Paleontologists from Dublin are expecting us to deliver it to them. Now you wouldn't want to set science back another thousand years would you?"

"Science!" snorted Moira. "The beast is death. 'Tis like catching the devil by the tail. What do you do with it once you've got it?"

I groaned in frustration. "I'm not here to argue with you! I'm telling you to get off this ship!"

"Nought will I budge, Mr. Slade! 'Tis here I'll stand till I have my way!"

I lit a cigarette, eyeing her slyly. "Your father wouldn't have put you up to this?"

"Now why would he be doing that?" she asked with widened eyes.

"To cause us trouble. If the monster was released we'd likely leave Nara. He'd want that."

"Not at all!" she said. " 'Tis you he wants to have it! 'Tis you he wants to leave as soon as possible, and *with* the monster. Should it get free, his divers will leave the island. 'Tis you he wants to take the animal."

As I stood there glowering at her, I felt a sudden tremor of the steel deck plates underfoot. I turned startled.

It was the monster up on the firedeck, turning around restlessly, trying to make itself comfortable inside the net. A rumbling growl emanated from the shadows under the canvas. I walked away from Sean and Moira to check the guard we'd posted that morning.

His name was Pat Phelan, from County Kerry. I saw him sitting there by the monster, a lean, wiry young man with curly blonde hair, a rifle across his knees, looking nervously at the great green beast. He was breathing heavily, but with the rifle in his hands he seemed to feel safe. Safer than he should, I thought absently.

When I returned to the rail I saw we had a visitor. Joe.

He turned, smiling, to me when I came up. "Sam, we've got guests. Did you know that?"

"I was trying to get them off ship, Joe," I said briefly. "I don't think it's safe aboard."

Joe shook his head gently. "You don't seem to understand the duties of a host, Sam. We should make all our guests feel comfortable on the *Triton*. It's Moira's first time aboard. We should show her around."

I froze. Joe was very close to Moira now, almost touching her. My flesh crawled. Joe Ryan had definite ideas about Moira. I felt sick suddenly, as if this had all happened before.

"The monster," Moira said swiftly, moving back just a step from Joe

as he tried to take her arm. "You must free it. 'Tis not to be kept in captivity. Don't you see? 'Tis a manifestation of evil."

Joe smiled tolerantly, putting out his hand and patting Sean's head. "Oh, I don't see it that way at all, Moira. This is a great discovery for science, a tremendous advance for paleontology."

"You'll be taking the beast to Dublin, then?" Moira asked softly, crestfallen.

"Sure!" Joe said. "Come with me, I'll show you the ship."

He took her arm and pulled her close to him. She looked across at me, frightened at first. But then, when she saw my face, her expression instantly changed, and she deliberately snuggled up to Joe, lifting her chin in the air, flaunting her closeness to him, and playing it broad for my benefit.

"'Tis a pleasure I couldn't afford to miss," she said, speaking in her heavy singsong brogue again, for my benefit. "Sean," she said as an afterthought, "go with Mr. Slade. 'Tis anxious he is to show you how to drive the ship."

As they moved out of sight she looked once over Joe's shoulder and made a face at me. She was playing with fire. I figured, let her get burnt.

I looked at Sean, and he looked at me. "Girls," he said with disgust. "'Tis impossible to understand them."

I laughed and gave him a harmless punch in the shoulder. We started for the bridge where I intended to show Sean how to box the compass, when we heard another thumping and banging from the monster's roost up forward.

"Tell me something, Sean," I said. "Did anyone out here on Nara ever see that thing before?"

"Ogra? No."

"Then how come you're so familiar with it?"

Sean smiled and looked at me pityingly. "And why should anyone have to be seeing it to know it's there?"

He had me. I was about to admit it when the abrupt concussion of a rifle shot was followed by a piercing scream. The scream died out in a hideous bubbling gurgle. There was a tense, unbroken silence for about three seconds and then the deck was pandemonium. Crewmen appeared from all sides. We raced for the monster's net. When we got there Jack Finn had already arrived, with six crewmen.

The first thing I saw was the huge rent in the shark net, a gap that had been torn by the monster's powerful talon. My eye followed along the line of the rent to the outstretched form of Pat Phelan. His body was twisted oddly, and blood poured from it all over the deck. The

rifle had been slung out of reach of the monster's talons. I picked it up.

"Secure that net!" I cried. Jack Finn began shouting orders to the crew.

"*Slabhra!*" shouted the Bos'n. "Cable!" One of the men rushed across the deck for the coil of steel cable. He was back in an instant. The seven of them then tried to whip the cable through the strands of the net, trying to weave the gaping hole together. The monster moved forward threateningly.

I fired four shots in toward the big beast. It moved back, growling and roaring. But it stayed back, afraid of the bullets buzzing about, even though they could not penetrate the tough outer hide.

I moved over and looked down at Pat Phelan's body. His viscera had been completely removed with one swipe of the monster's talon. Blood had spouted all over the deck plates.

I turned to Sean. He stared down at the corpse. When he looked up at me I could almost read the expression in his eyes. "I told you so."

I turned away, angrily. Death, they had said. Death it certainly was. The death of two divers. The death of three men in third boat last night. And now the death of a crew member of the *Triton*.

I turned to Finn, who had just finished patching up the shark net. "Boats," I said quietly, "prepare this man for burial."

"Yes sir," he said, turning away so I could not see his eyes.

I didn't want to watch. I was sick at heart. I was fed up with this excursion of death, fed up with monsters and octopuses and killer whales, and everything that went with them. I was through.

"Where the hell is that sister of yours?" I asked Sean testily. He merely looked at me and shrugged.

"Stay up here," I told him, and went below. I knew Joe was showing Moira the ship, and I figured he had taken her down by the galley for a cup of coffee. Funny he hadn't heard the commotion on deck. Or perhaps he had, and didn't care to have Moira see it. Particularly since she wanted to get rid of the monster. It would only help prove her point.

I tried the galley, but there was no one there. Nor were the two of them in the crew's quarters. I retraced my steps, frowning. Where could they have gone? The engine room was no place for a girl.

I was passing the captain's cabin when a slight movement inside caught my eye. The door was open. I went over and peered in.

It was Joe and Moira.

They didn't see me. They didn't see me because they were too busy. I stood there a moment, watching them, disgust welling in me like a

flood if nausea.

He had her down on the bunk, tight in his arms, and although he had not progressed past the preliminaries, he was certainly making fast and very sure time with her.

I was sick—fed up—with myself and Moira and Joe.

Then her eyes opened slightly, and over Joe's shoulder she saw me. Suddenly her eyes widened, and she pushed Joe off her. It was no effort. She could have done it before, but she hadn't.

"Somhairle!" she cried. "*Somhairle!*"

She struggled to get up, trying, at the same time, to pull down the dress that had ridden up over her thighs, to push the open buttons of her blouse together.

Joe turned with a leer. "Hi, Sam. Didn't your mother ever teach you to knock before entering?"

"She did!" I snapped. "And now I know why."

Joe slid to his feet, fluid and catlike. Beneath his bravado he was eyeing me uncertainly. I must have shown a great deal of my anger on my face—more than I thought.

Moira was sitting on the bunk now, shaking her hair back and tossing it away from her face nervously. She watched me out of those grave, sea-green eyes. I could see that she wished she had never started fooling around with Joe.

"Okay, Sam," Joe said, moving toward me. "Show's over. I'd turn around and trot out if I were you."

"You've been asking for it for a long time, haven't you, Joe?" I was mad now.

His eyes were slitted. "I haven't been asking for it, Sam," Joe said softly. "Why don't you check out your facts with the little lady?"

Moira's eyes widened, and she glared at Joe. Then she turned to me. "No, Somhairle!" she cried. "It isn't true! Somhairle!"

"It looked pretty damned real to me, Moira," I growled.

"*Real* is the word for it," Joe grinned wolfishly. "*Real good!*"

A red swirling cloud enveloped me, and I moved without thinking. I lashed out at him swiftly, trying to block his blows. But I must have telegraphed my punches, because he threw me aside, grabbed me by the waist and tossed me onto the bunk.

I bounced right off, going for his throat. He twisted aside and swung a blockbuster at my head. I saw it coming and ducked. But I tripped, and went down on the deck.

I lay there a moment, trying to grab a breath of air. Then I climbed to my feet.

Moira was holding onto Joe's arm, pleading with him, her eyes teary, her hair around her shoulders. Joe's face was wryly amused. His big, knotted biceps were straining, but I knew he wasn't interested in me right now. He could have thrown her off him in an instant with a minimum of effort. He didn't seem to want to. He knew a good thing when he had it.

Moira turned to me, her face red and wet. "*Somhairle!* You stop it! 'Tis a truce I'm asking!"

I moved at Joe, unable to hold back.

Moira turned to me, pulling at my arm the same way she had clung to Joe's.

"*Somhairle!* By all that's holy!"

The girl. The green-eyed lovely shape of all that was wonderful in the world. She, pitted herself against two senseless, fighting, brawling males. I shook my head. I turned away. How did she always manage to shame me in the worst possible way?

I shook her arm off me and plunged through the doorway. As I moved down the passage outside the cabin door I could hear Joe's flat laughter, and Moira's angry scolding.

One of them was phony.

I figured it was Moira.

Chapter 8

I watched Sean and Moira McCartin rowing back to the dock in that ridiculous curragh and I cursed myself for letting her make such a fool of me. I'm a pushover for a smart woman. I go all out for one and then I find out she's made of tinsel and papier mâché like the rest. First that bitch Anita, with the soft, level eyes, the straightest girl in Texas. Sure. All the time shacking up with an oil rigger from the fields behind my back.

I'd almost killed him that night in the alley behind the hotel.

Now I wanted to do the same thing to Joe.

But it wasn't his fault. It was Moira's. She'd showed her hand, and I knew it was no good between us and had never been any good from the start. She was just a woman like all the rest of them, with the same tricks and the same lies.

Beneath my feet the deck shuddered from the impact of the monster's movement. I turned and looked across the deck at the big steel net under the canopy. The crewman on guard now was Michael Degan, and he saw me looking.

"Hello, Mr. Slade," he said, civilly enough.

"Keep your distance from that thing," I said. "Hear?"

"Mr. Finn told me in the same words," he nodded unhappily. "The damned thing is a curse. If he's allowed to remain in captivity, Mr. Slade, evil will befall us all!"

I started to shake my head with annoyance. But something in the man's eye held me. I said nothing.

" 'Tis the word," Michael Degan said, and lapsed into gloomy silence. He moved away from me and stood on the other side of the monster.

The monster's big head swiveled around and its red eyes glared at me. It moved slightly, trying to get comfortable under the weight of the net.

I shuddered. I could feel for it. I could feel the weight of that metal net on top of me, too. I was the monster, entrapped in a prison, not allowed my freedom.

"I know you, Ogra," I said "I know how you feel."

I'd spent six months in a Red prison camp during the Korean war. I'd never been so close to madness in my life before. It was a brand new experience to me, and a nerve-shattering one. I'd never hoped to

escape. I'd spent every day wondering if I could last through another night inside my cell.

Life wasn't worth living under conditions like those.

I glanced across at the beast. It glowered at me. Ogra, I thought, you had it, old buddy. You'll never again see the bottom of the ocean.

Small wonder the beast had killed. Small wonder it flailed and maimed. Manifestation of evil? Maybe. Or maybe a manifestation of man's evil to man.

Maybe it was a warning, warning of destruction and disaster to come. Like with nuclear fission. Like with space exploration. Like with the hydrogen bomb.

Moirra was right. I had to set the beast free. Too much was at stake if I didn't.

I'd put it up to Joe, man-to-man. With the death of Pat Phelan, maybe he'd face the issue and agree. What did we have to lose, anyway? There was no money involved.

I found Joe below, standing by the doorway to his cabin, reading a piece of paper. He glanced up when I approached and slipped the paper in his pocket. His yellow eyes watched me warily.

"She is a bit of a friendly type, isn't she?" I grinned.

Joe's mouth dropped open. Then he threw his head back and laughed. I knew he'd been sweating out my reaction to that tête-à-tête on his bunk. And in disarming him like that, maybe I'd gained an edge in my argument about Ogra.

"It's about the beast," I went on, before he had a chance to say a word. "Phelan was killed, you know. On guard."

Joe bit his lip angrily. "I know about Phelan. Its a dirty shame."

"We've got to let the damned thing go."

The yellow eyes narrowed, and probed me. "You lost your marbles, old man?"

I shook my head. "The beast is bad luck. The island people are right."

Joe snorted. "It's that girl, isn't it? She and her brother! The islands are full of superstitious fools like them. They think everything on earth is a manifestation of good or evil. They're stupid pagans, Sam. I'm surprised you agree with them."

I shrugged, trying not to let him read my thoughts. If he knew I even entertained the idea of letting the monster go, he'd kill me. "I just don't like it," I said lamely.

"So you don't like it," Joe said and reached into his pocket for the piece of paper he had been reading when I came up. He broke out a

great big grin. "Here, Sam. You're going to change your tune when you get a load of this. Came in by radio ten minutes ago. It's what I've been waiting for."

Curious, I took the sheet of paper.

"GUARANTY THIRTY THOUSAND POUNDS AGAINST FIFTY PER CENT OF GROSS TO EXHIBIT CAPTURED MONSTER AT DORKIN'S LONDON CIRCUS."

I stared at the wire, and then I looked at Joe. I could see what it meant, but my mind wasn't ready to accept the fact.

"Don't you see, you knothead! We're rich! We'll make a fortune with the monster! I've been dickering with these guys secretly."

"But, Joe," I stammered. "What about the University of Dublin? We promised them—"

"To hell with the University of Dublin!" snapped Joe. "Man, we're in!"

"But what about the Irish government? Won't they try to stop us?"

Joe's eyes narrowed craftily. "Who's to know until it's too late?"

I chewed on this for a moment. The plan had merits. And it did mean a lot of money in our pockets. But just the same . . .

I thought of the dead divers. I thought of the three oarsmen torn to pieces in the harbor. I thought of Phelan on the deck of the *Triton*.

"Damn it, Joe!" I said finally, "we can't do it! We've got to let the thing go and get away from this place. I don't want any part of it!"

"We're partners, Sam," he said quietly. "You want out now?"

"No! I want to bring you to your senses! This thing is a killer! Think what it would do if it got loose in London! My God, Joe, you'd be responsible for the deaths of thousands of people!"

"I've thought it through," snapped Joe. "If you want out, get out!"

He took back the wire and folded it carefully and tucked it in his pocket. I didn't like the intense, stolid expression on his face.

"It's that damned girl!" he burst out angrily. "How could you let her turn your head?"

"She doesn't mean a thing to me," I said defiantly. I wondered if I sounded as insincere as I felt. Even though I had lost her, I still wanted her.

"You're a fool!" Joe shouted. "You're really asking for trouble! She's just like that other one you got hung up with in Port Arthur!"

"Shut up!"

"No, sir! It's for your own good, Sam! She's trying to work on you. For anything she can get. She's like a bitch in heat. Hell, I should

know, shouldn't I? Can't you see her game now?"

The blood boiled up in me. I knew he was right. That was what angered me. She was just playing both ends against the middle. She was using me. And yet I knew I had to do something to Joe for saying it. I knew he was a killer, but I had to attack him. I had to come to grips with him.

"Keep off Moira!" I yelled.

"She's a demon, a damned demon!" Joe cried. "She's played you for a sucker! The worst kind!"

I leaped at his throat. Immediately I felt myself swung to one side, and my back smashed against the bulkhead along the passage. I slumped down on the deck. Joe was standing over me, his yellow eyes fiery, his hands knotted.

"Is this what you want?" he cried.

"Yes!" I yelled back. "That's what I want!"

I shot to my feet again, smashing my left into his face. He ducked back, but I caught his jawbone and I heard a crunch. My fist felt as if it had been smashed under a rock. Joe went back. He stumbled.

I leaped on him as he lost his balance, carrying him to the deck. I flailed at him blindly, not knowing what I was doing, and in turn I could feel him gouging at my eyes, tearing my shirt, hammering me unmercifully. We rolled over and over on the deck, smashing against the bulkhead to one side, and then thrashing back against the other.

I was blind. I was enraged. I couldn't think. There was no reason for us to be scrapping this way. What had ever possessed me? I was mad. He was right. The girl had turned my head.

Moira.

Then it all came clear, and I was sitting on him chopping away at his face, my knuckles slimy with blood.

I stopped. God, was I some kind of beast myself? And there was one other thing I hadn't thought about at all. What happened if I did get the best of Joe? Did I seize the ship. Did I become captain of the *Triton*.

Some subconscious awareness of my impossible position had stayed my hand at the last moment there. I had been too long at sea to depose any captain. I had plunged into a fight I couldn't possibly win. "Joe," I said.

He rolled his head, eyeing me through bruises.

"Joe." I got off him and stood up, shaking my head, trying to clear it.

He moved toward his cabin. I went after him, trying to frame some kind of an apology. We were partners, and he was the boss on board

the *Triton*. How could I square myself?

I stood in the doorway, paralyzed.

Joe faced me, his eyes gleaming. He held a revolver in his hand. He had gotten it out of his things.

“Don’t mess with me, Sam,” he said tightly, drawing his lips back from his teeth in a grimace. “I’m going to take the beast to London. If you want to come along, come on. Glad to have you. But if you try anything funny . . . Well, I *still* am captain on the *Triton*.”

There was only one thing I could say. I said it.

“Okay, Joe. You win.”

For now, I said under my breath as I went above. For now. Because I had made up my mind. I was definitely going to free the beast. Whether it was because of Pat Phelan’s death, or because of Moira’s fear of the thing or because of the bad blood between Joe and me, I was going to free it. I didn’t spend time trying to analyze my feelings one way or the other.

And I had a plan. It was simple and direct. I knew exactly what I’d do. I’d get the donkey engine going, attach a cable to the winch, and hook into the top of the monster’s net. I’d have to trick him into his cabin, and barricade him up. Then I’d have to keep the crew under guard while I moved the cargo overboard.

I needed someone trustworthy to help me.

Jack Finn was out; he was loyal to Joe.

One of the crew? They were loyal to the Bos’n, far more so than they were loyal either to Joe or me.

Then I knew. Sean and Moira McCartin.

The trick was to get them aboard without creating a stir. The obvious thing to do was smuggle them on at night. And there was a way to manage that. Several hours later I climbed to the bridge room where I found Joe with a chart of the British Isles spread out on the table. He was bending over it, making penciled calculations.

He glanced up casually as I joined him. “Oh, hello, Sam. I’m just trying to lay out a course.”

As if nothing had happened between us! Apparently he had no suspicion of my intentions.

I leaned over his shoulder. “When do we sail?” I asked.

Joe scowled and rubbed his chin. “Not before midnight, I’d say. The tides will help us from twelve-thirty to four. Why?” He turned and his yellow eyes flickered. “You got a heavy date or something?”

“Oh, I thought I might do some reconnoitering on the beach tonight,” I drawled.

Joe struck a match and lit a cigarette. "One last fast one on the village mall," he chuckled. "Go on. I'll count on you back at eleven-thirty. Finn can drop you on shore after chow."

"I don't know if I should make a big production out of it," I said, as if reluctant to complicate matters.

"No, no," Joe said, turning back to the charts. "Go right ahead. It may help get her out of your system for good."

I left him looking at his charts. And I was grinning to myself. He'd practically set it up for me, step by step. It would be the easiest thing in the world to do.

I'd have Moira get hold of her father's launch, by hook or crook. She could do it, if not alone, at least with Sean's help. Then I'd meet her and Sean at the cove, ride out to the *Triton*, secure Joe in his cabin, hold the crew off at gun point, and set the monster free. Most of the crew would probably want to help me, anyway.

It was a daring plan, but I knew that a daring plan had the best chance of success and I was determined to succeed. I knew if I didn't the damned monster would kill us all.

Chapter 9

About four o'clock in the afternoon the village fishermen began coming back in from their day's stint. I hailed a likely looking lobsterman sailing a one-man curragh, and handed him a note I'd written to Moira. On the outside of this note I had written Sean McCartin.

"Sean McCartin," I explained to him carefully "*Tugair nóta ceo do Sean McCartin*. Give this note to Sean McCartin." I deliberately wanted to keep it out of Moira's hands because I knew her father would be watching her like a hawk.

The lobsterman nodded, and I handed him a few silver coins which he pocketed immediately. He seemed visibly impressed. "Sean McCartin," he promised.

I kept making excuses to join Joe in the bridge room. About six o'clock I picked up the binoculars for the fifth time and scanned the rock promontory by the McCartin cottage. Then I saw it. One of Moira's blue shirtwaists was hanging on the clothesline, beside the thatch-roofed cottage. That was the signal I'd mentioned in my note: *Message received and will do*.

Everything was set. I was to meet her at the cove at 10:30 that night. So far so good. I went on deck then, and uncoiled a line over the stern of the *Triton*, securing it to a shackle bolt. No one saw me. I made sure of that.

It was about chow time, and I went down to eat with Joe and Jack Finn. I tried not to appear over-eager, but at the same time I didn't want to underplay it and appear to be engaged in something deep. I got Joe into a discussion about the Cuban revolution and we stayed carefully off the subject that was really bothering both of us.

At about 9:30 I looked in at Joe in his cabin and told him I was on my way to the beach. He came out to see me off in the launch, and warned Jack Finn to come right back and get the ship ready to pull out. I arranged to meet Finn on the dock at 11:30, even though I knew damned well I wouldn't be there. We waved to Joe, and he disappeared.

"Little last-night exercise?" Jack Finn asked me, grinning behind his cigarette as he steered the launch in toward the dock.

"Something like that," I said. "I wish I had your gift of gab in the mother tongue," I added a bit wistfully.

Finn laughed, his gusty voice booming out over the harbor. "You

seem to be doing fine, Mr. Slade.”

I waved a hand at him in dismissal as I hopped out onto the dock.

“Eleven-thirty,” he called to me as he turned back to the *Triton*.

Even with my pocket flash I found it difficult going, climbing the rocky hill behind the village, and crossing over behind McCartin’s cottage to approach the cove from the side. But I finally made it after bloodying up my hand once in a fall on the rocks.

I climbed quietly down the steep embankment behind the sand strip, and stood there brushing myself off.

“Ssst!”

I looked carefully around. I couldn’t see a thing.

“Somhairle!”

It was Moira all right, but where was she? I could see absolutely nothing.

Then I remembered the cave mouths. I moved over toward the cliff and poked the flashlight beam in through the openings.

She jumped out at me laughing. I staggered back. “Moira!”

“I knew you’d do it!” she cried. “I knew you’d help me! I’m ever so glad, Somhairle.”

“Sh!” I said. “I don’t want your old man poking his nose into this.” I looked around. “Where’s Sean?”

Her eyes were round in the darkness. “I thought you’d sent him off on some chore.”

I shook my head. “You mean you didn’t get my message?”

“I got it fine! ’Tis why I’m here. But Sean said nought about coming, too.”

“I need you both,” I said, trying to cover my concern. Had McCartin found the note, and held the boy?

“Since dinner I haven’t seen hide nor hair of him!” Moira went on.

“Perhaps he’ll turn up later,” I said. “Where is the launch?”

She smiled. Then she beckoned me with her finger and stood up, backing into the cave mouth. I followed. “Turn your light here.”

I did as directed. The beam lit up the inside of a large natural cave, and I could now see something I had not guessed. The cave was connected to the ocean by a free-running sluice of water. And just in back of Moira a shiny blue launch with the name “*Maighréad*” on its prow bobbed up and down in the silence of the cave.

“Get in,” I said. She climbed in beside me. “I don’t know how you did it, but thanks.”

“ ’Twas as simple as stealing candy from a wee one. I have a way with Mulkerns.”

“Who the hell’s Mulkerns?”

“A favorite boatman of my father’s,” said Moira with a lilting laugh. I pointed the beam of light at her face, and saw her toss her head to one side flirtatiously.

“You little minx!” I had to grin. She’d done it as much for me as she’d done it for herself. How could I get angry because she’d enlisted the aid of this nonentity named Mulkerns?

I started up the launch and adjusted the engine down until it was muffled and low, and then moved the craft slowly out through the inlet and into the cove. Here the waves were rougher than inside the cave. The tide was coming in strong, but I headed the prow of *Maighréad* for a point a half mile from the lighthouse at the end of the cape, and kept pushing.

Moira didn’t say much. She was obviously excited at the prospect of freeing Ogra. I had my hands full trying to navigate in the darkness without running lights.

As we passed the point of land on which the light house sat, I breathed a sigh of relief. The worst of the journey was over. Now all I had to do was locate the lights of the *Triton* and head for them. There were no more obstacles in the way.

Maighréad was in the open sea now, and the heavy waves knocked us about a great deal more than they had in the protection of the cove. I made out the silhouette of the *Triton*, and headed confidently for it. I’d been going in that direction for several minutes, when suddenly my jaw dropped open.

“My God!” I cried. “Why, that lousy, double-crossing bastard!”

“Whatever is the matter?” Moira asked, turning to me with deep concern.

“The *Triton*!” I cried out, pointing. “It’s moving out of the harbor! It’s headed for the high seas! Joe’s seen through my scheme and he’s taking that damned monster to London without me!”

I was so shocked all I could do was sit there and stare.

Moira was immediately angered. “Well, then, we’ve just got to catch up to him!” she announced.

I pushed *Maighréad* to her limits, and we soared over the harbor waters after the fleeing *Triton*. One thing to McCartin’s credit, he had good equipment. *Maighréad* really moved along. As we sailed, I cursed Joe Ryan enough to turn the air blue. I knew now why he’d been so cozy with me at dinner, why he’d gone along with my beach escapade. He’d guessed what I was up to, the slob!

We did it, too. We did catch up with the *Triton*. I don’t know how, but the fact is, we did. And apparently nobody saw us. The *Triton*

herself made too much noise, and possibly the deck watches were too worried about the monster to hear anything else.

Certainly Joe had no idea of pursuit from me.

We reached the hullplates of the *Triton* about 11 p.m., and I immediately cut the engine of the launch and tied up to the trailing line which was still there. I showed Moira how to steer *Maighéad* so she didn't bang against the *Triton's* hull.

"Wait here," I whispered to her, and climbed the line, scrambling hand over hand like an old-time sailor.

It was dark on deck, and I crouched there cautiously a moment, catching my breath. There wasn't a sound. I moved forward, then, coming out of a crouch, scanning the deck for the watch, and as I did so the whole world fell in on me, and I went down in a heap.

I came out of it blinking and shaking my head to clear it. I found myself flat on my back in my own bunk. I stared about me, not remembering a thing. Then I saw Joe and everything slid back into focus.

"Welcome aboard, old buddy," said Joe, his yellow eyes gleaming.

I lay back and stared at the deckhand. "You're mighty rough with the belaying pin."

"Pistol butt," said Joe. "You come sneaking up like that, you get treated like a sneak."

I glared at him. "Talking about sneaks, what particular species are you?"

Joe shrugged. "You had to get smart and try to free the monster. You forced my hand. So I had to get a little smart and get the beast away before you could."

"Where the hell are we now?"

"Heading for London and Dorkin's Circus."

"Oh well," I said. "It was a good try."

Joe's eyes narrowed. "If it wasn't for that fool girl, Sam, I wouldn't have acted the way I did. She's the one who poisoned your mind."

"Uh huh," I said.

"It was silly of us to fight over her in the first place," Joe continued. "And it was sillier of you to try to get back at me by dumping the beast overboard."

"It seemed like a good idea at the time."

"Because she poisoned your mind, Sam. My God, I'd think you had more sense than that! That woman's nothing but a common tart. She's laid everybody on the island at least once. I even had a roll in the hay with her myself the other night on the island."

"I don't believe it!"

"It must be obvious to you now, after seeing her with me in the bunk. That kid is a woman of the world. She's got what it takes, and she knows what to do with it!" Joe laughed.

I felt miserable. He was right. When I'd seen her there on the bunk with him, it had struck me forcefully how sensual and knowledgeable she was in Joe's arms. She must have had a lot of practice to be that expert.

"That's why she played me," Joe said finally.

I started up from the bunk, and then winced. My head throbbed with sudden pain.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just that. Don't you see the plot? She's in it with her father. They want that monster for the money it'll bring them. Hell, she never was going to release the fool thing. That was all sweet jazz to tweak you by the ear, my boy! She was in it plain and simple to rob us of our thirty thousand and dump the loot from the circus into her father's lap."

I lay there staring at the ceiling. The story did have a ring of authenticity. It sounded more like the women I had known. And Moira was a woman. There was no doubt of that. I could still taste those lips, smell that hair, feel the soft silken skin of that naked breast.

"You're sure?" I scowled.

"You're damned right I'm sure. Dorkin wasn't the only one who wanted us to go with him. There were several other shows trying to get us. McCartin was in touch with one of them, you can bet your boots. Wanted us to release the monster, so he could bring it in himself."

I snorted. "Maybe you've got something there, Joe."

"I'm only surprised she could pull the wool over your eyes. You must be losing your buttons. She was just a plan old lay, and you know it. Tell me the truth." Joe's eyes gleamed. "Did you have any trouble with her the first time you tried?"

I turned my face to the wall.

"Well?" Joe persisted. "If she was the sweet little innocent she pretended to be, do you think she'd bed down with you first time she had the chance?" Joe let that sink in. "Not on your tintype! No sir, Sam. She was just a little tart, and she got what she deserved!"

I sat up instantly alert. "Where is she now?"

Joe looked at me. "She got away."

"Sailed back in the launch?"

Joe faltered. "I think so."

I reached out and grabbed Joe's shoulder, wincing at the pain. "You sure?"

Joe nodded. "I think so. I cut her loose from that line you dropped over. God damn it, who cares?" He was suddenly angry.

I closed my eyes. "Get out of here. Let me rest. I feel sick."

"Okay," Joe said, instantly sympathetic. At the door, he turned. "Oh," he said. "We've got a passenger."

I glanced at him, puzzled.

"Sean. He's stowed away on board. We just found him." Joe grinned. "Claims he wants to go to London to look for his old lady, name of Maigréad McCartin. Seems she ran away from McCartin with some freighter captain four or five years ago. He thinks she's in London."

That figured.

"Nice kid," Joe said, and stepped through to the companionway. "Better stuff than his sister, you can bet your boots!"

And he was gone.

I lay there and closed my eyes. But no matter how tight I squeezed them, I couldn't get the sight of that naked body out of my mind.

Not Moira's.

Anita's. I could see her again, lying on that unmade bed, her breasts gleaming and tanned from the Texas sunshine, her hair short-cropped and blonde, her eyes blue, her nose pug and freckled, her legs long and lovely, her mouth a crimson slash across her face. She lay there, her eyes closed, smiling, reaching her hands out to me, waiting for me to kiss her.

Only it wasn't me she was waiting for.

It was Rick Dumont, an oil-well wildcatter from the western part of the state. And he lay in the alley, more dead than alive. I'd found him in the lobby below, where I'd been waiting for him to come back to her, with the bottle of whiskey he'd gone to by.

While he lay there in his blood, gurgling through his broken teeth, I'd come into their room, looking at the girl who had promised to be mine forever, the girl who had promised to marry me, the girl who wanted her children to be mine.

I moved down over her, touching her body. In the darkened room she lay there, her eyes closed, either asleep or playing some kind of enigmatic game with her oil-well capper. I leaned down closer now, and I touched her naked breast with my hand. She squirmed delightedly.

“Oh Rick!” she sighed. “Touch me again.”

I did. I touched her on the other breast. She gurgled with joy. “You can open your eyes now, Anita,” I said softly.

“Oh Rick,” she sighed, and then I saw her face freeze. She did not open her eyes. “Rick,” she said, suddenly panicky. “Rick!”

Then she opened them, hoping against hope that I would be Rick. Hoping against hope that her ears had deceived her.

But it wasn't Rick, and it wasn't her ears that had done the deceiving. It was she. Anita.

The lousy little tramp.

“Rick is out in the alley, Nita,” I said quietly. “I hope he's dead because he isn't going to be much good to you now.”

The color drained from her face. She lay there mute and rigid. “My God, Sam. What do you mean?”

“I kicked him where he lives,” I said casually. “And I hurt him bad right where he should be hurting.”

“Sam,” she whispered. She tried to turn over and cover her nakedness. I flipped her back on her shoulders and buttocks. She lay there and I could see the thin veil of moisture come out on her naked skin.

“I don't like to be suckered, Nita, baby,” I said softly.

“Sam!” she rasped out, fear making her eyes bulge, her mouth writhe back from her lips. “I don't mean it, Sam! Forgive me, Sam! On my knees!”

“Bitch!” I snarled, feeling the black poison rise in me, feeling the sweat on my palms and the burning pain in my gut.

“Don't hit me, Sam!”

I grinned at her. “I wouldn't waste my muscle on you, Nita. You're nothing! *Nothing!* You hear?”

Tears streamed out of her eyes. She sniffled. “I'll do anything, Sam, anything!”

I looked at her, hard and long, looked at her face for the last time. “You've already done it.”

And I went out of there. She lay weeping and moaning. All she'd lost was one more man in a long string of men. Me, I had lost a lot more: my ego, my manhood, and all my illusions about women.

I shuddered now, feeling the throb of the *Triton* under me as she plowed her way through the Atlantic Ocean, around Ireland, heading for the Thames River and Dorkin's London Circus.

I shook myself awake and staggered up the companionway topside. I hung over the taffrail and stared at the *Triton's* wake. I was so

outraged at my own stupidity for getting tangled up with that two-timing Moira bitch that I felt like beating my head against the deck plates.

I heard a step behind me. It was Joe. He came over and slapped me on the back. "You're looking better, Sam."

"Yeah. Feeling no pain. Thanks, old man, for bringing me to my senses."

"Sure," said Joe.

We both looked down at the water and I wondered if Joe noticed the same thing I did. There was a strange white, gleaming iridescence down there.

"Phosphorous," Joe murmured.

"It's coming from the scuppers. It isn't in the sea." I turned and looked at Joe. "It's the water off the monster."

"I'll be damned," Joe said. "Must be something like human sweat, huh?"

I shrugged. And looked at the long trail of phosphorescence behind us.

Chapter 10

Except for several times during the next twenty-four hours when the monster seemed restless and thrashed around on deck, rousing us all to a full-scale alert, we passed an uneventful trip from Nara to the mouth of the Thames.

Joe and I were at the wheel, trying to come into the river, when we were interrupted by a tremendous blare of whistles and horns emanating from a group of ships bearing down on us from the river.

In the lead was a launch, bulging with a crew of newsreel cameramen, television crews, and a dozen well-dressed people I guessed immediately were British officials of some kind.

But the thing that really threw Joe and me was the huge banner unfurled on the yacht, showing a madman's conception of our monster, decorated with letters of gigantic size screaming:

DORKIN'S LONDON CIRCUS
WELCOMES GORGO!
THE EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WORLD!

"Who the hell is Gorgo?" I asked, still not quite sure what was going on.

Joe shrugged. "That's show business, Sam. I guess it's our monster."

"Thought his name was Ogra," I grumbled.

We didn't have much more time for chatting. The convoy of cameramen, public relations men, radio broadcasters, and newsreel men ran up to us and boarded the *Triton* like a swarm of hungry locusts.

Over the babble and hubbub I saw a tall, dignified looking man with a top hat push himself forward and seek out Joe. We were standing on the ladder to the bridge, and Joe nudged me.

"Dorkin," he said.

He was right. "I'm Andrew Dorkin," the dignified man said in clipped, precise tones. They were a little too precise. Somehow I got the distinct impression that the man had Cockney origins in his background, origins which he had found it useful to cover up as much as possible in his public life.

"Captain Ryan?" Dorkin went on. He turned to me. "Then you'd be Sam Slade."

We shook hands all around. Before we could say anything more, an

energetic, fluttery little fellow with gray hair pushed his way in between us and advanced on Dorkin. The little fellow was carrying a hand microphone, which he was already talking into.

“Mr. Dorkin,” the man snapped out in staccato tones, “we understand that your circus has contracted for the exhibition of this strange prehistoric creature. Perhaps you could tell our listeners some of your future plans.”

Dorkin beamed, and gazed about him. “Plans? Well we’ve built a special tank—rushed the job through in record time, in fact—and now we hope to just sit back and watch the money roll in!”

“I see,” the little man said. “There is a report from Dublin that the Irish government has instituted legal proceedings to recover the animal.”

“True enough,” Dorkin admitted smoothly, “It will go through the courts, naturally, and in a year or so we’ll have a decision.” That tickled him somehow. He gave a broad smile. “Meanwhile, come and see Gorgo at Battersea Park!”

“By the way,” the little man said. “That name Gorgo. Has it any special significance?”

“Certainly!”

I was glad to hear that. I glanced at Joe. He raised an eyebrow.

“The Greek Monster,” Dorkin sailed on. “The Gorgon! What could be more horrible than a creature the mere sight of which could turn a man to stone! Been working all week on our billboards.”

“Aha! Then you had actually seen the creature before today?”

“Not at all!” He waved toward the banner. “But I’ve had the most accurate reports—from you gentlemen of the press, radio and television!”

I don’t remember much more of that morning, only enough to recall it as pure hell. But it wasn’t over by a long shot. Dorkin had just given us a brief résumé of our triumphal entry into London, scheduled for the next day, when we were waylaid on the dock by a highly indignant group of gentlemen. I recognized one face. It was Professor Marius Flaherty, of the University of Dublin! Flaherty was eyeing Joe and me coldly, shaking his head. Joe was trying to pass it off lightly, but I felt like the worst kind of a heel. We *had* given the Dubliners the impression that we were going to give the animal to them. And now . . .

A big heavily-built man with a stiff black mustache was chatting with Flaherty, but he broke off to approach us.

“Who’s Dorkin?” he asked testily.

Dorkin frowned and moved forward. “Here, my good man. What do

you want?" Dorkin glanced impatiently at his watch. "We're in quite a hurry, you know."

"Indeed," said the big man coolly, looking down his nose at Dorkin. Dorkin had the grace to flush. "I'm Professor Leroy Hendricks, of the University of London. My colleague, Professor Flaherty of the University of Dublin has flown in to London to join me in protest of the outrage! To deprive science of a creature unique in evolutionary biology! To turn it into a circus freak! It's too much, sir! Outrageous!" Hendricks narrowed his eyes and sniffed into his Anthony Eden mustache. "Quite apart from the fact that you stole it!"

Joe's face turned red. "That's a matter of opinion sir!"

Hendricks eyed Joe coldly. "And who are you?"

"I'm the guy who caught it."

"American, no doubt," murmured Hendricks, turning once again to Dorkin.

Dorkin was speaking smoothly. "But Professor Hendricks, when the courts decide—"

The volatile Irishman shook his head. "But even worse at the moment, you know absolutely nothing about the animal!" Flaherty protested. "It's extremely dangerous!"

Joe moved forward, angling in between Flaherty and Dorkin. "We've handled him so far!"

"It may even carry disease-bearing parasites or unknown bacteria. And yet you take it into the heart of a great city before any observations can be made. Before any tests—without the slightest thought of what the results might be!"

Joe glowered. "Look, just what is it you want?"

Hendricks towered over Joe. "I want the opportunity to make a complete study—"

"Sure," Joe nodded. "If it doesn't interfere with business."

Dorkin insinuated himself adroitly in the middle of the group. "Gentlemen, believe me, once we have the creature installed at Battersea, you'll be given every facility."

Flaherty stared at Dorkin. "You insist on taking the animal into the city?"

"Arrangements have already been made," Dorkin murmured, eyeing Flaherty from beneath his brows.

Hendricks turned to Dorkin with an air of resignation. "I suppose you've thought of the need to give the animal a tranquilizing drug while you transport it."

Joe and Dorkin exchanged puzzled glances.

“If you haven’t,” Hendricks went on, “you’d better.”

Dorkin smiled triumphantly. “Perhaps you gentlemen could do that for us!”

Hendricks turned and looked sourly at Flaherty. Then he turned stiffly to Dorkin. “Very well. We’ll be back in the morning. Good night.”

We spent the rest of the day getting the *Triton* berthed at the docks on the Thames, and readying the huge flatbed trailer Dorkin had procured for the monster. We fell exhausted into bed at sundown and tried to snatch a night’s sleep for the big day.

True to their promise, Professors Flaherty and Hendricks showed up early in the morning and administered the tranquilizers to Gorgo, who had spent the night shifting restlessly about on the deck of the *Triton*, confused and bewildered at the strange sounds of London about him. Needless to say, his own howls of resentment had likewise alarmed half of London.

At dawn we began the gigantic operation of lifting Gorgo and his net onto the flatbed. But the tranquilizers had apparently done their work well. Gorgo dozed in a somnolent state all the way through London. For emergency’s sake, Joe and I had Dorkin hire some flame throwers to accompany us.

We set out finally, bands playing and flags waving, with Gorgo inside his net on the flatbed. I was astonished at the crowds we pulled. People leaned out of windows in every building and crowded the housetops. The streets were so jammed no traffic could move.

We drove up from the London Docks along the Thames past the Tower of London, past London Bridge, through Cheapside, along Fleet Street and Strand to Trafalgar Square, down Whitehall to Westminster Bridge and House of Parliament with Big Ben, past Buckingham Palace, Victoria Station, and on over the Chelsea Bridge to Battersea Park.

It was here that we finally pulled into the grounds where Dorkin’s Circus was staked out. It was dusk when we entered the gates. All around us I could hear the growls and restless movements of the big wild animals caged about us.

Gorgo, meanwhile, hadn’t let out a peep all day. He dozed in his huge shark net, seemingly at peace with the world. I hadn’t seen a glint from those fiery, red eyes for a full eight hours.

I wondered about the wild animals, who were so suspicious of each other under normal circumstances. What did they think of Gorgo, a water-lizard freakishly snatched into this modern age from some pre-history.

I could smell the restlessness and the fear in the air. I began to have a foreboding of trouble and turned to Joe to say something, but Sean's big eyes caught me first. "The animals do not like Ogra."

I shivered. "You're right, Sean. But there's not much we can do about it."

Sean nodded agreement, and looked out at the cages we were passing. A lion bared its teeth, wrinkling up its nose and snarling at the monster. A tiger prowled back and forth, vaguely disturbed. At the end of the street an elephant, staked out in an open field, moved its huge feet up and down in a kind of nervous stamping.

I didn't like it one bit.

Then I saw the huge tank which had been constructed to house the monster. It was a beautiful job. I had to hand it to Dorkin. It was in the shape of a bowl, about a hundred and fifty feet in diameter, its rim a raised concrete parapet four feet off the ground. In the center stood an artificial rock just like the kind zoos have in polar bear tanks.

The giant bowl was filled with fresh water, with a standpipe for continuous circulation. The parapet was about twenty feet deep, so that it would come to the bottom of the monster's forearms when Gorgo stood at full height. A network of high tension wires, five strands of them four feet apart, were mounted on steep posts embedded in the parapet at about twenty-four intervals. Heavy porcelain insulators attached them to the posts.

About twenty feet back from this stood an eight-foot fence to keep the spectators away from the tank and wires.

A twenty-foot opening had been cut into the fence now, through which Gorgo was to be passed into the enclosure, and then up a ramp placed in front of the tank.

We stood by while the craneman got the big machine ready. Then the flatbed trailer was backed up to the opening in the wire fence.

Jack Finn came up to us. "Okay, Captain," he said to Joe. "The crane's ready. You better take over."

We walked out into the roadway, and Sean and I kept back away from the workmen. I looked around and saw the two flame throwers standing by. Dorkin himself stood on the opposite side of the giant bowl between Professors Flaherty and Hendricks.

Now Joe was monitoring the craneman to lower the chain over Gorgo's net. The chain man climbed out on the crane arm, and shimmied down the chain. As the hook at the end came down closer to Gorgo's net, the monster seemed to stir a bit, lifting its massive head and gazing up at the man. The chain man hooked into the net, and signaled to the crane operator.

The giant arm moved slowly skyward, and the net tightened around the quiet monster. Finally, the net left the flatbed and started through the air. I could see Gorgo's red, bright eyes. He had awakened and was looking about him.

"The tranquilizer seems to be working," I heard Hendricks say.

Flaherty nodded. "So far."

The crane swung the suspended animal over to a spot directly above the ramp leading to the pool. Joe signaled and the crane arm slowly lowered. The chain man, suspended above Gorgo's still body, took over from Joe, indicating the speed of the descent to the operator. Slowly, gently, Gorgo came to rest on the inclined ramp and the chain was pulled free.

A group of workmen ran in with huge metal clippers and started to cut the steel net from around Gorgo. I glanced across at Dorkin. The big man was watching with badly concealed apprehension.

I ordered Sean to join Dorkin, and I went over to Joe and Jack Finn. They would need me in the delicate operation of freeing the net from around the monster's head.

Up close I could see that Gorgo seemed to have dropped off to sleep again. Two men with clippers worked quickly and steadily along the animal's back. As they cut, the three of us pulled the big net aside, until most of Gorgo's body was freed.

Then it happened. Some stupid idiot of a cameraman dashed out of the crowd and shot a flash picture. The flash instantly roused Gorgo, whose huge beady red eyes opened and glared out at us. Now Gorgo roared, thrashing about, snapping the last threads of the steel net. Joe, Jack Finn and I ran for our lives.

"Flame throwers!" Joe hollered. "Get those flame throwers!"

I turned to watch. As I did so I felt the ground tremble beneath me. The elephant, staked out a hundred yards away, was stamping the ground again, as the animal had when we first rode by.

I cowered there, caught between the roaring of Gorgo, now thoroughly aroused, and the snarling and trumpeting of the angered elephant. I heard a great rending sound as if a tree had been snapped in two, and I squinted through the evening darkness toward the elephant's stakeout. The elephant reared on its hind legs, its front leg completely free! In its agitation, it had pulled the stake out of the ground. The elephant now began pounding toward me, drawn by the roaring of Gorgo.

Over my shoulder I saw Gorgo lashing about with its massive tail. Now, for the first time, Gorgo was actually free of the confines of the steel net. He moved out tentatively, down the ramp. The flatbed stood

in his way. With a swipe of the tail, Gorgo turned the truck over.

The ground trembled again. The roars of the elephant and Gorgo drowned out all other sound. My heart was in my throat. I ran pell-mell for the safety of the roadway, and none too soon. All I could see were quickly moving shadows as panicked men dashed off into the darkness, trying to get as far away as possible from the enraged prehistoric monster.

I turned, cowering like a rabbit behind the safety of the cement bowl. Joe stood not far from me, cursing. And behind us stood Jack Finn, Sean and the professors. The enraged elephant, charging madly over the ground, headed straight towards the green sea monster.

Gorgo moved out curiously, meeting this new challenge with grim determination. Gorgo swung toward the elephant, and observed it for a moment. He moved his head sideways, indulging in an intellectual study of the strange, tusked pachyderm.

The elephant ran full blast into Gorgo, burying its tusks deeply in the massive green body. The monster staggered back under the impact, but immediately regained its balance, turned, and faced the elephant, beating the ground angrily with the huge, powerful lizard-like tail.

The elephant back off, stunned. For the first time in its life it had not succeeded in goring an enemy with its tusks. This enemy was a brand new one with a peculiar smell and a tough hide that did not damage.

The elephant charged again, coming in from the side to sink its tusks into Gorgo's throat, instinctively seeking the jugular. As it came running in, Gorgo shifted stance just the slightest, and flipped at the elephant head with its massive tail.

The elephant crawled to its feet, swaying and weaving, staring with unfocused eyes at the green monster eyeing it truculently. Clambering from the ruins of the oak tree, the elephant again mounted an attack, and rushed across the ground at the beast. In the do-or-die tactic, the elephant leaped off the ground in its last dozen yards, and hurtled directly at Gorgo's neck.

Gorgo's shifted stance again to sidestep the elephant's rush. The elephant tore into Gorgo's side, and as it did so, Gorgo turned and sank his own sharp fangs into the neck of the elephant. With a sudden flip of the body, Gorgo lifted the entire five tons of wriggling elephant into the air and threw him down to the ground.

We could feel the shock waves go through the earth at our feet.

And then, as the elephant lay twisted and bleeding on the ground, the monster of Nara rose to its full height and plunged its talons into the body of the elephant. Instantly the elephant was rent to pieces and

moved no more.

There was a short hiatus to the violence. As Gorgo looked down at the kill, Joe signaled the flame-throwers again, and they rushed in toward the monster. Joe and I ran over with them. I saw Jack Finn come up behind us, the inevitable cigarette dangling from his mouth. He was charged with emotion, but on the surface he appeared as placid and expressionless as he'd ever been on the *Triton*.

The flame-throwers advanced on Gorgo from two directions. I could see the monster's red eyes staring at the flames. Gorgo's head moved from side to side. Actually, the monster looked as if he was in a mood to take on the whole bunch of us, and the circus animals besides.

Joe gave a whistle, and the flame-throwers tried a couple bursts of flame. Gorgo roared, and pawed at the ground. The talons grazed the two men. Joe moved in, waving the flame-throwers closer. They edged in, keeping a blast of flame steadily directed on Gorgo's tough hide. The flames touched Gorgo. He bellowed in anguish, and moved back.

"Oh, God!" someone cried beside me. I looked down. It was Sean.

"Get out of here!" I yelled. "You little fool, do you want to be killed?"

Sean looked up at me with pain in his eyes. He was visibly suffering along with the monster.

Now the beast began to retreat, bellowing in pain, guided and urged on by carefully controlled bursts of flame. I saw Jack Finn move in to help the first flame-thrower.

Gorgo turned and saw the ramp. Avoiding the fire, he headed for the ramp, deciding that was where salvation lay. I began to feel a slight relaxation of tension. Gorgo was just about safely caged.

Then, so fast no one could anticipate it, the great tail flicked. Jack Finn had just moved close to direct the flame-thrower. The tail hit him full in the body, a smashing blow. He sailed into the air and slammed to the ground, lying motionless.

I ran over there, disregarding the damned beast and the flame-throwers. I reached him first, Joe right behind me. I turned the terribly mangled body over. I saw the blood and the broken bones and the torn flesh and I was sick.

"Boats!" I murmured, and let the body settle to the earth.

Joe closed his eyes. "God," he said, almost a prayer.

I stared into the darkness about us. I saw Sean in the light of the flame-thrower. His eyes were on mine. There was no surprise in them. It was almost as if he had known from the first. Who was next. I wondered. Joe? Sean? Me?

In the distance I could see that the flame-throwers had now finished

their job. Gorgo had finally climbed the ramp, and was moving uneasily about in the cage. Once inside the pool, he rose to his full height at the parapet, reached out and grasped the lowest strand of charged wire.

Instantly there was a bright, crackling flash. Gorgo bellowed in pain, backed off, and climbed upon the rock in the center of the pool. Then he lifted his head and sounded a long, plaintive roar.

Sean watched with level, understanding, compassionate eyes.

Chapter 11

We drew crowds. We broke records. People came from all over England to ogle the Eighth Wonder of the World. There wasn't enough room for everybody who wanted to see Gorgo.

I should have been the happiest man in the world.

I was the most miserable.

I'd stand out there and watch the shrieking, yelping fools as they peered and goggled at the monster in the tank. I'd watch them, and then I'd watch Gorgo.

Gorgo was bewildered and unhappy. The milling, gaping crowd seemed to outmaneuver him. Every so often he would give a mournful, lonesome bellow, at which the stupid crowd would roar in delight. Then Gorgo would shrink from the sound, and try to get under the surface of the water.

But if course, there wasn't room.

Sean was as sick of the circus as I was.

Joe thrived on it. He counted the money with Dorkin every night, gave me my split, and then disappeared into London somewhere. Wine. Women. Song. And plenty more if I knew Joe. He'd bought himself one of those low-slung foreign cars, a cream white Frazer-Nash Targa Florio, and he'd red dog that through the London traffic. He bought himself about twelve new changes of expensive duds. He liked to live it up big. He was in the chips now. More power to him, if that was what he wanted.

As for me, I was sick and tired of the whole damned business.

About a week after we'd opened, I was sitting inside the circus wagon with Sean, who was in bed asleep, when I heard Joe drive the jalopy up and get out. He was whistling jauntily, and when he opened the door I saw that he'd bought another suit of clothes. He appeared a little uneasy as he walked up to the table where I was sitting. He looked at the bottle of Irish whisky I was working on.

"I was going into town," Joe muttered hesitantly. "I saw your light."

I nodded, not looking at him. "Have fun."

"I thought you might like to go along," he said nervously. "Have a couple belts with me."

"Don't worry about old Sam, kid. I'm having a couple of belts myself." I looked up at him. "How's business?"

Joe expanded, his eyes lighting up, ignoring the needle I was giving

him. "Great!" Then he deflated, like a broken balloon. "Sam, will you quit bucking it?" He looked around at the circus wagon disgustedly. "Get out of this dump! Live a little! I got a whole suite at Claridge's!"

I looked over at Sean. "This wagon seems to suit the two of us, Joe."

Outside there was a sudden commotion in the grounds. We could hear animals roaring, scuttling about in their cages. I got up and looked out of the window. I couldn't see anything, but I could feel it.

"The animals are going crazy. Something's going to happen, Joe. I can feel it. Boats is dead. Who's next?"

Joe shook his head and pounded the table with his fist. "I'm as sorry about Jack Finn as you are. It was a tough break, that's all."

"He's got a wife in Galway. That'll make it just fine for her, knowing it was only a tough goddamned break!"

"Maybe we can send her some dough," Joe suggested absently.

"Sure. That'll help a lot. But he's dead. And nothing's going to bring him back. There'll be more tough breaks before this is over!"

Joe took a deep breath and turned toward the door. "You've been listening to your new buddy too much." He squinted at Sean's sleeping form.

"No," I said softly. "I've been listening to someone I should have listened to before. Myself."

"See you, kid," Joe said, waving and stepping out into the night. I sat there and poured myself another drink. I could hear the Frazer-Nash start up. Joe threw it into gear and roared down the road toward London.

It was only about five minutes after the sound of the jalopy faded that I got the phone call from Professor Hendricks at Dinosaur Hall at the Natural History Museum. He seemed to be in a state of suppressed excitement, and wanted to see both Joe and me right away. I explained that Joe was out. He suggested I come over as soon as possible.

I left a note for Sean, and flagged down a cab on Queens Road. It was only a short drive across Chelsea Bridge and up to Cromwell Road. I walked up to the big terra cotta building with its distinctive Romanesque front, staring up at the high towers which seemed to loom two hundred feet in the air.

A guard took me to Dinosaur Hall where all the reconstructed reptiles of the Mesozonic Age stand about in shadowy darkness.

I found Professor Hendricks at the top of a fifteen foot ladder, holding a photograph in his hand and comparing it to the skull of the dinosaur skeleton beside him. At the foot of the ladder Professor Flaherty stood, studying three huge photographic blow-ups of Gorgo

which he had taken several days before at the circus.

"Oh, hello," said Professor Hendricks, squinting at me in the gloom. He climbed down the ladder. "I'm glad *you* could come, at least."

That seemed to be a cut at Joe, but I let it pass. I shook hands with him and with Flaherty, who said nothing.

"You said there was something important."

"We think so," Hendricks said briskly. "Mr. Slade, the creature you've captured is not an adult specimen."

I looked at him. "You mean, Gorgo isn't full grown?" I glanced at Flaherty who would not meet my eyes.

"No. In fact we believe it's in rather early infancy."

"But how can you tell?"

Hendricks sighed. "It would be impossible to explain all our deductions to a layman. But I can say this. By comparative anatomy and by various measurements, we are almost positive of our conclusion."

"You mean there may be a full-grown Gorgo around somewhere?"

Flaherty joined in the conversation. "It's a fair assumption. Where there are offspring, there are generally parents."

"Perhaps the large ones were destroyed in the volcanic upheaval. In that case, Gorgo is the only one."

"Perhaps." Hendricks seemed dubious.

I rubbed my chin, looking up into the shadows at the dinosaur recreation looming above us. "How big would a full-grown Gorgo be?"

Hendricks snorted a moment into his mustache. "Well, I can give you only an approximate guess. Come along with me. The Brontosaur exhibit might give you a fair estimate."

We moved to another corner of the big room. I looked at the exhibit, a small skeleton about the size of a crocodile. This was mounted directly below a monster Brontosaur thirty feet high at the shoulder.

"That would make a mature monster of Gorgo's type nearly two hundred feet high!"

Flaherty nodded. "At the very least."

I wondered if Hendricks and Flaherty were pulling our legs, trying to dream up some crazy story that couldn't be checked out in a drafty attempt to squeeze Gorgo away from us.

"This is some kind of gag to put the heat on us," I said. "Why don't you admit it?"

Flaherty smiled with superiority. "The heat, Mr. Slade, may already be on." He turned to Hendricks. "Obviously the proper authorities

must be notified at once.”

That got me mad. “You mean you want to stir up a hornet’s nest just because of a few calculations you’ve made on a piece of paper? The hell with that noise, gentlemen!”

Hendricks’ tone dripped with scorn. “I am afraid Mr. Slade, that the decision is no longer in your hands. And you can tell Captain Ryan and that entrepreneur, Dorkin, I said so, if you wish.”

“You bet I will!”

But in the cab headed back for Battersea Park, I had some second thoughts. I knew one thing: eggheads don’t operate like other human beings. With them, everything is for science. The worst thing they could do would be to make a mistake and look foolish. They wouldn’t say Gorgo was an infant unless the monster actually was. How they knew for sure, I couldn’t guess. But I realized they were not lying.

In that case, I had a momentary qualm. Suppose Gorgo’s parent, say the monster’s mother, decided to look up her lost baby? Would this two hundred foot giant come striding up out of the water the same way Gorgo had? Had it, too, been released from the suboceanic depths in the same volcanic upheaval that had released Gorgo?

Sweat rolled off my face. I didn’t want to think about a struggle like that one! Against a two hundred foot Gorgo? Impossible to imagine.

I thought for the first time in many days of the Island of Nara. I thought of the lighthouse, the radio shack, and McCartin’s cottage with its grass-thatched roof. I thought of Moira, and that undid me.

Somhairle. I could hear her voice. I could feel the touch of her hand, the velvet softness of her body. Why had I left her? Why had I tried to forget when I knew I couldn’t? Even if she had tried to trick me, she was mine. My thoughts always turned to her, no matter how hard I tried to keep them in check.

Now I knew I had to go back to Nara to see her. She had a hold over me that I couldn’t break. Even though I realized I was the biggest fool in the world, laying myself wide open to another doublecross, I had to go back to Nara. To Moira.

I rapped on the glass and told the cabby to take me to the nearest airport where I could get a plane for Galway, Ireland. He nodded and turned down Grosvenor Road at the Thames, and went on to Westminster Bridge, and directly to Croyden Airport, south of London.

At Croyden I caught the midnight plane to Shannon Airport and Galway. I got to Galway in the early hours of the morning. It was no trick at all to rent myself a launch, and I set out for the island along about noon, after packing two box lunches.

At sundown I caught sight of the odd bald-pated outline of Nara in

the distance, and I must say I was glad to see the old hellhole. Mostly, I guess I was glad to be so close to Moira again.

I pulled into the harbor, tied up at the dock, which seemed to be showing some signs of repair, and roused a villager at one of the sod huts along the beach.

“Moira McCartin,” I told him, handing him a note. I gave him money. “*Amháin di Moira McCartin.*” I said stressing *only*. He nodded. I knew he got the idea. Probably spoke English better than I did.

Then I ate the box lunch I’d brought along from Galway, and headed the launch out around the lighthouse point. I came into the cove, tied the launch out of sight in the cave, and went out on the beach.

And there I waited for Moira.

She came the way she had always come, like a wraith out of the darkness. And once there I held her tight in my arms, and I knew she was no wraith. Those lips, those eyes, and the feel of her against my body—all these things were very real.

“Somhairle!” she sobbed, and I could tell there were tears in her eyes. “ ’Tis really you, come back. I had given you up, I had.”

I kissed her again. “You’re in my blood, Moira. Even though you’re as untrustworthy as all women!”

She disentangled herself long enough from me to look me in the eyes. “ ’Tis a fine one you are to be talking ‘untrustworthy’ to me Somhairle!”

“I saw you in Joe’s bunk there! I saw you kissing him, and enjoying it!”

“Why should I not go to another man’s arms, when my own man does not even have the decency to tell me he’s married!”

I held her in my arms, stunned, unable to think. Married? Did she mean me?

“Who told you I was married?” I asked abruptly.

“There, ’Tis said!” Moira whispered. “I never meant to bring it up, because I was too deep hurt, but ’tis the truth, and you know it, and now you know I know it.”

“I’m not married!” I snapped out, and suddenly the whole scheme of Joe’s was laid bare before my eyes. “Joe told you didn’t he? He told you I was married. So he could make time with you himself!”

Moira’s eyes were fiery. Her face was flushed. “I saw the picture of you and your wife! I saw them, Somhairle! How can you deny it?”

Anita! Sure. Joe had taken a snapshot of Anita and me at a beach party. He had it in his wallet. He’d shown that to Moira and told her I was married to Anita. No wonder she’d let him kiss her like that! No

wonder . . .

I held her tightly. "Moira, Joe lied. I'm not married. I swear it. I'm not married and I love only you. I've been with other girls, certainly, but it is you I'm in love with. I always will be! Now can you believe that?"

"Oh, yes!" she cried. "And 'tis you only I've ever loved. That in the ship's cabin with Captain Ryan was merely a woman's way. 'Twas spite, *Somhairle*. Spite against you for being married and leading me on the way you did!"

"And you and Joe," I said hesitantly. "The two of you—?"

" 'Twas never a thing between us, *Somhairle*. Believe me, never a thing but a trick to turn you green with jealousy!"

I laughed. "I love you, Moira."

She sighed. "Oh, *Somhairle*," she said, and she leaned into my arms and we were one again for a long, crashing, breathless moment. And when we came out of it, she was weeping tears. "I would have gone with you on the *Triton*, if I'd known the truth," she said. "But when Captain Ryan cut the line to my father's launch, I thought I'd best come back to Nara and forget you. That's why I didn't board the ship, *Somhairle*. I knew we couldn't free the monster, no matter what, once you were discovered."

"It's all right now," I said.

"And Sean!" she cried suddenly. "He is all right?"

"Right as rain, Moira. You'll be with him again as soon as we can get to London. Then we'll never be apart again, I promise you that."

"We can leave tonight?" she asked, her eyes glistening.

"Yes Moira," I said, and I pressed her tightly to me. And as we lay there, I told her how Joe had misrepresented her motives for freeing the monster, how he had hinted that her father was trying to steal the monster and exhibit it himself.

Moira chuckled and was amused at my gullibility. She assured me there was nothing to it at all, and I laughed and felt like a kid again. I knew that Joe had been trying to play us, one against the other.

I felt her soft flaming hair pressing against my face, and I felt the warm soft curves of her body warm against mine, and I forgot all about the reason I had come to Nara. I kissed her again, and she closed her eyes, holding me to her with her arms twined about my neck. It was warm in the sand, and I gently slipped off her dungarees and unbuttoned her shirt so that her breasts fell free and gleamed in the starlight above us.

She lay there naked on the sand, a study of voluptuous curves and gentle planes, and her moist lips gleamed. She touched my belt with

her hand and released its clasp, and then her hands were around my waist, clawing at my back, crushing me close. We struggled against one another, moving our bodies into the age-old position of duality and completeness, and her lips tasted of salt and tears and I touched the taut nipples of her breasts and she cried out in the night and dug her head into the sand, arching her back to me. She seemed to reach outward with every fiber of her being, and surround me, and then she twined her legs about me in one terrible last shudder of emotion and the world whirled about us and the sea pounded on the beach and the skies opened and we seemed to be in the middle of space somewhere, with absolutely nothing else in the universe but us, our two bodies, and the one love that held everything, universe, planet, and us, together forever.

Spent, we lay there naked in the sand, staring up at the clear night and the stars twinkling there, and we touched each other without a word, and let our sated, glowing bodies drink in the nourishment of our remembered pleasure.

"My wife," I whispered through the flaming soft hair, into her intricately formed, marvelously wrought ear.

"My husband," she said. "*Mo fear*," she repeated in Gaelic, and I said it after her. She laughed. "You say, '*mo bean*.' My wife."

"*Mo bean*," I said.

And the darkness moved over us and enveloped us and it was just like that until I could feel a vibration in the air, a strange uneasy phenomenon I could not explain, and I turned to Moira and I asked her, "Do you feel that, too?"

She sat up, her eyes wide and fearful. "There is something out there."

I looked into the cove. "Something?"

She shivered. "If Ogra were not already captured—"

With sudden shock I remembered why I had come to Nara. The two hundred foot monster!

Speechless, I turned to her. But as I did so I saw it in her eyes. Disbelief. Fear. Horror.

I turned. It was coming up out of the water, just as I had imagined it might, rising like a giant formless thing, weaving back and forth in the darkness, scenting out the island, towering closer and closer, moving with its giant tail through the water, coming to Nara, coming to wreak vengeance on the world, coming to destroy us all.

"Oh, *Somhairle!*" Moira cried, and hid her face in my chest.

I stared, petrified, as the monster towered high over the lighthouse, and then reached out with one talon, slapped at the striped tower, and

sent it spinning in a million pieces into the waters of the bay, the waters that were now surging and flowing outward like miniature tidal waves from the monster's moving body. With a shuddering crash the lighthouse structure disintegrated, and the huge, unbelievable sea serpent came lumbering out of the water, looming over us like some avenging demon, its fiery red eyes focused on us.

Part Three:

ARMAGEDDON

Chapter 12

It was Moira's quick thinking that saved us. The instant she comprehended what had happened—that this towering, two-hundred foot sea serpent was reality, she leaped to her feet, crying for me to follow her. Acting purely on instinct, I did so, and she led me to the only safe spot, the caves.

Naked, shivering, absolutely drained of all emotion by the sheer weight of the terror hanging over us, we clung to each other like frightened stone-age beings, hiding our bodies from the inhuman manifestation from below which thundered about us and threatened our puny existence.

The ground shook all about us. Huge waves crashed in through the channel joining the cave to the sea. The launch was hurled time and again against the side of the rock walls by the violent rocking of the water spray shot toward us, draining off the impossibly huge body of the saurian beast. Its growl and snarls filled the air like the thunder of a tremendous electric storm.

In my numbed mind all I could see was the stunning sight of that immensely magnified approximation of our own Gorgo, slapping at the striped lighthouse at the tip of the cape, demolishing it with one swipe of the massive tail.

We heard other strident noises as well. The radio tower's collapse. The cottage's destruction. We heard boards and glass ripping and shattering on the open island above us.

Moira sobbed, unable to contain her grief. Obviously all the human population of the island of Nara would be dead or dying in a matter of moments. Everyone except us. We were in the only possible shelter anywhere. The beast was destroying everything in its frenzied search for Gorgo. Every minute or so the sound of destruction would cease. But only for an instant. A tremendous thumping would make the whole rock mass of the island shudder violently. I could imagine the big beast beating the island flat with its powerful tail, enraged and frustrated in its search for its young.

In my arms Moira sobbed and clung to me. Our naked bodies were shaking with fear. This was certainly the end of the world. I had one consolation. We would, at least, go together.

The bellowing continued amid the sounds of shrieking, terrified human beings coming to us as the sea monster bashed in more of the rock cottages down by the harbor.

After a long time we heard a tremendous splash, and then a silence like death descended upon the island.

"The beast has gone," I said. I hoped it was the truth.

"Oh God!" Moira sobbed, clinging to me, her breasts warm and soft on my naked chest. She buried her head and her lustrous hair on my shoulder.

"Come on," I said. "We've got to be sure."

I led her out of the cave. Outside we came upon a sight I shall never forget. Towering clouds of dust spiraled into the air from the wreckage of the lighthouse, the radio tower, and the McCartin cottage. There was no sound on the island.

I scanned the horizon of the sea. And there, like a telltale wake that was as obvious as a trade mark, gleamed a line of phosphorescence, exactly like the trail Joe and I had seen from the stern of the *Triton*.

The monster was gone.

But I had the uncomfortable thought that it was going exactly where the *Triton* had gone. The terribly unnerving premonition occurred to me that it was in pursuit of Gorgo; the beast was headed directly for London.

We gathered up our clothes and dressed hurriedly.

Without mentioning my fears to Moira, I helped her climb the cliffside. The island of Nara, to all intents and purposes, had ceased to exist as a human habitation.

Moira's cottage was completely destroyed. Only scattered piles of ripped-up planking and rubble remained. The rest of it was scattered to the four winds. The same was true of the cottages that had made up the stone village on the beach.

We ran to the twisted ruins of the McCartin cottage.

"Father!" screamed Moira. She scrambled from me.

It was inconceivable to me that there was anything left of Kevin McCartin, but I followed her anyway.

Under a pile of splintered planks, the big red bearded man lay, his eyes closed, his flesh bleeding and torn. Moira stooped over him, crying out his name in the lost, pitiful way of a distraught child.

He opened one eye, looking up at us through a film of pain. "Child," he whispered.

"You're all right!" she cried hysterically. "You're all right!"

He tried to smile. It took courage. I gritted my teeth and bent over him. "Take it easy."

"Slade," he said stiffly. Then he winked. "Take care of my little girl and boy."

I reached for his hand, lying in the dirt, and squeezed it tightly.

“The Monster of Nara. The Monster I invented. It came and got me!” he said. “All the gold. All McCartin Retribution for the death of Dórach Dolan.”

That was all he said. He went limp then, the great body convulsing for one last time under the pile of timber, and then letting go, relaxing to death.

Moirá crossed herself and lifted her face to the heavens, trying, in the only way she knew, to prepare the soul of Kevin McCartin for its ordeal to come.

We buried him quickly in back of the site of the cottage.

No one on Nara was alive. We searched the ruins. And then we hurried to the launch which I had tied up in the cave, possibly the only place on the island safe from the monster’s destructive onslaught.

By dawn we were back at Galway, and I put in a telephone call to Joe in London. I gave him a brief report of the appearance of the new monster at Nara Island, and then Moirá and I flew to Shannon Airport, and on to London.

When we landed at Croydon and walked across the big floor in search of a cab, we were approached by two burly Marine Sergeants.

“Mr. Slade,” the bigger one of them said.

“Yes.”

“You’re to come with us.” Each of them stepped to one side of me and took an arm.

“I’m not under your orders! What do you mean I’m to come with you?”

“Orders of the admiral,” the big one said, stiff-lipped and unsmiling. There was under his urbane politeness a driving urgency which somehow unnerved me.

“The admiral!” I looked helplessly at Moirá.

“ ’Tis best to be going, *Somhairle*,” she said. “I can take care of myself.”

“No. You can’t!” I turned to the bigger sergeant. “Look. I’ve got to get this girl to a hotel. Can we drop her off on the way?”

He nodded. “Yes, sir. We’ll go along with you.”

I considered. That was better than nothing. But the admiral—how had I gotten in bad with the admiral?

In the admiralty vehicle I pondered my situation. It didn’t seem good. In a short chat with the two marines I discovered that Joe was on his way to the admiralty too. We were both in it together. It must have something to do with Gorgo.

Worried, and hardly aware of what I was doing, I installed Moira at the Berkeley Hotel near Piccadilly Circus, and then went with the silent, stolid, very British marine sergeants.

We drove to Whitehall, drawing up in front of a huge red brick and stone building with three tower corners and a campanile. It was one of those Italian palladian style buildings, imposing and in the grand manner. Naval guards stood sentry duty in front of the wide doorway, and passed us quickly through into the quiet doorway, and passed us quickly through into the quiet interior without any fuss.

The sergeants hustled me down a corridor and up a flight of stairs to a room marked "*Admiralty Communications*." It was a room with a long row of uniformed naval radio operators seated at what looked like an elaborate switchboard on one side. On the other side of the room a huge wall map of the British Isles hung from the ceiling to the floor.

I saw Joe. He was in conversation with a gray-haired, straight-backed man in his sixties, obviously the admiral. Joe saw me come in and waved me over. I left the big sergeant who caught a nod from the admiral and vanished.

"Admiral Hugh Brooks," said Joe. "This is my partner, Sam Slade."

The admiral stared at me with startling deep blue eyes. I felt as if he were reaching down inside me to see what made me tick.

"Ah, yes, the young man whose message alerted us to the trouble on Nara."

"Yes, sir," I said. "There are no survivors—except for a girl named Moira McCartin."

The admiral nodded briskly. "We knew the moment we lost contact with Nara that there was some difficulty there." The bright blue eyes probed me. "Your clear-cut report leaves no doubt in our minds now as to the fantastic thing that happened."

The admiral waved at the huge map on the wall.

"Her Majesty's Aircraft Carrier *Royal Oak* has proceeded to area N-3-4 to report any unusual sightings or conditions in the vicinity of Nara Island." He paused significantly and looked at Joe and then at me.

"Reconnaissance aircraft from the carrier, as well as one destroyer, have sighted a creature answering your description." The admiral turned to the map and indicated a spot in the sea south of Ireland. "In this area. The creature submerged when they approached. We are waiting a further report at this moment."

The admiral's icy blue eyes chopped to me.

"I feel you two gentlemen should be the first to know about this situation." I shivered. He had us by the short hairs, and he knew it.

Business-like, he went right on. "Perhaps there is something you know about this creature which will help us to appraise it."

I nodded. "First off, sir," I said, "I'd say it isn't an 'it' or a 'him.' It's a 'her.' "

The admiral lifted an eyebrow. So did Joe.

"I'd guess it's the adult of the species. The mother. The one we've got quartered at Battersea Park is her child."

The admiral stared at me stonily.

"Check with Professors Hendricks and Flaherty," I said impatiently.

"I already have," the admiral said coolly. "They concur with you in your theory." The admiral shrugged. "Very well then. The monster—the second monster—is hereafter referred to as 'her.' "

Joe was staring up at the map on the wall. "Excuse me, sir," he said. "It looks to me as though the thing's heading for London. That sighting's along the same route the *Triton* took."

"Definitely," said the admiral. "Which in itself calls for some kind of explanation. Do you have one?"

Joe frowned, looking a bit subdued. "Well, we were playing a stream of water over it—him—during the passage. That was Professor Flaherty's idea. We may have left some kind of a track in the ocean."

"Joe," I broke in. "The phosphorescence. When Moira and I looked out to sea after the thing had left Nara we saw a long trail of iridescence in the water."

"I see," mused the admiral. "Well, we don't really anticipate any great difficulties in controlling the monster. I have already taken notes from Professors Hendricks and Flaherty on the creature. Outstanding characteristics, vulnerable areas."

The admiral picked up a radiophone headpiece from the table in front of the map and slipped it on. He listened a moment, then pushed an intercom switch on the table. A squawk box beside it immediately came to life.

"We're in contact with the reconnaissance plane," the admiral explained briefly, taking the phones off. "That's the skipper of the destroyer speaking to the recon plane's pilot. Listen."

"Plane to Bridge. I see something now. She's four point off your starboard bow. Have you got that?"

"*Four point starboard.*" The skipper's voice repeated.

"*Don't you see her?*" The pilot's voice became suddenly agitated. "*My God, she's massive! That head, weaving back and forth!*"

"We see her now." The skipper seemed calm.

"She's looking for something. What's she want?"

“We’ll never know. Fire number one turret.”

We could hear the concussion echo from the shot.

“Plane to Bridge. I can see her. You’ve missed her! You’re way off to the left.”

“We can see. Fire number two.”

Again we heard the concussion.

“You’ve hit her direct! She just staggered back. Can you see? She’s impervious! Looks like she wants to throw the shells back!”

“Fire number three!”

Again the concussion.

“Plane to Bridge! She’s gone now!” The pilot’s voice went a bit slack then, apparently in reaction from the excitement.

“Cease fire!” That was the skipper’s voice. *“Cease fire!”*

“That did it, men. Good show!”

“Port two points,” said the destroyer’s skipper calmly.

“Whew!” sighed the pilot. *“What a close thing that was! You can’t see her from there, but I’m telling you—she was a huge thing! A great green lizard.”* The squawk box went silent.

The admiral turned to us. “At least two direct hits. I don’t suspect the monster will be coming back for more now.” There was just the hint of satisfaction in his voice.

“They killed it?” I asked. I didn’t want to throw any cold water on his jubilation, but frankly I had my doubts.

“She disappeared beneath the sea, as you heard yourself. They are sweeping the area now, but I’m sure she has almost certainly been killed.”

The admiral was about to reach across the table and flick the squawk off, when we all heard it at once.

“She’s up again!” the pilot’s voice yelled. *“Plane to Bridge. She’s out of the water! Look out! Your starboard bow! She’s reaching out for you!”*

“I see her!” cried the skipper.

“She’s coming at you! Get out of there, fast! Move! She’s going to—”

“Fire Four! Fire fi—”

There was a crackle of static, and then silence, silence in the middle of a word.

In the Communications Room no one moved.

The pilot’s voice came on again. *“Flight deck! Royal Oak! Plane to Flight Deck!”* the voice cried, trembling, on the verge of hysteria. *“I’ve lost contact with the Destroyer Bridge.”* Now the voice broke. *“The destroyer has been turned over! I can see men swimming in the water. I can*

see—”

There was another pause.

“Oh, my God!” cried the pilot’s voice. *“She’s—she’s breaking up the ship! She’s smashing it in two! It’s the most incredible thing I’ve ever seen! She’s huge—vast—absolutely impregnable.”*

A calm flat voice cut in on the air. *“Flight Deck, Royal Oak, to Recon Charlie. Do you read me, Recon Charlie?”*

“I read you,” the pilot’s voice choked.

“Radio your position. We’re on our way.”

There was no answer for a moment. Then we could hear what seemed to be a sob. *“It’s no use. The ship is gone. The—the thing pushed it down into the—the water! She pushed it down and broke it to—to pieces under the water!”* The pilot’s voice soared to a thin tremor. *“She ripped it to pieces like a kid with a toy!”*

The Royal Oak Operations Chief’s voice shook now. *“But—the men—can’t we save the men?”*

“There’s no chance. There’s nothing afloat to save them. The thing has pushed the destroyer down under the water. No hope.” The voice went dead.

“Report in,” said the carrier’s Operations Chief wearily.

“She’s going under the water now,” the pilot whispered. *“No! she’s rising! She’s screaming, roaring out! She sees me up here! She’s reaching up! But I’m too high for her. Too high!”* The pilot began laughing hysterically.

Then there was a click, and the squawk box went dead.

Everyone in the room was frozen, and a deathly quiet settled down. The admiral was completely stunned. His face was white and he could not speak for a long while. No one would say anything until he did.

“Capsized,” he muttered finally. “Sunk. With every man aboard.”

I jumped up. “All right! Now what?”

The admiral shook his head. “It’s terrible.”

Joe snapped it up. “But what’ll you do now?”

“I know what we’ll do!” I said, turning to Joe. “We’re going to turn the thing loose! Take it back to sea and dump it! While we’re still got a chance!”

Joe moved against me, gripping a handful of my shirt tightly. “What’s the matter with you? This is the twentieth century! There’s got to be a way to handle an overgrown lizard.”

I flicked his hand away and stared at him. Then I turned and hurried over to the door.

“No you don’t!” Joe cried out, and moved after me.

Angered by Joe's remark about the lizard, the admiral came to life. He shook himself, as if rousing himself from a bad dream. "There's no doubt we can stop the creature." He looked about him for support. Everyone was staring at him dully. "We'll call you if we need you again. Good evening, gentlemen."

Always the officer, I thought. I ran through the doorway and out into the quiet corridor.

Joe came right after me.

Chapter 13

As we drove back to Battersea Park in Joe's Frazer-Nash, I told him in detail about what had happened on Nara Island. I told him that Moira was at the Berkeley, and that I was going to let her sleep through the clock before disturbing her again. She had been through a terrible ordeal and needed rest. Later, her brother Sean could move in with her. He would be much better off away from the negative influence of the circus people and the Gorgo crowds.

If, that is, Sean would be willing to leave Gorgo's side.

Joe drove me up in front of the circus wagon and let me out. As I stood there, about to mount the steps of the wagon. I could hear the rumbling, fearsome cry of Gorgo at my back. The sound of his roar had changed subtly in quality since we'd come to Battersea Park. It had taken on a kind of mournful note that made my flesh crawl.

"So long, Sam," Joe said, flicking on the ignition. "I wish you'd take my advice sometime and live it up a little! Do you good!"

I shook my head. "Not me, Joe. I like it here."

He shrugged, gunned the engine, and drove off as I stood there watching him. I climbed the steps of the circus wagon, opened the door and snapped on the light. Sean was all bundled up in his bed asleep. I didn't wake him. I didn't want to disturb him, and I thought Joe must have told him about his father's death already.

I crossed quietly over to the refrigerator and got out a fresh bottle of Irish whiskey. I poured myself a stiff one and sat at the table to toss it down. I needed some kind of bracer. That damned monster. Not Gorgo. The big bugger. She was the one to make you really sit up and take notice.

I finished two more shots and then got up and went to the window. I looked through the darkness toward Gorgo's cement tank. I could hear him out there, thrashing around restlessly, every so often letting loose that plaintive, mournful bellow.

I shivered.

I came back to the table, and almost knocked down Sean, who was standing in my path, his wide eyes watching me curiously.

"You knew," I said to him, my tongue suddenly loosened by the liquor. "You knew all the time, didn't you?" He just looked at me. "You knew it was more than just a big lizard! All their science. All their civilization. You knew more than the whole bunch of them."

Sean glanced at the half empty bottle of Irish whiskey on the table.

“Come on, then! If we’ve got to free the Avenging Angel, let’s go!”

Sean was puzzled. “Go, Sam? Go where?”

I shook my head and opened the door. I stumbled down the steps onto the ground, and I could hear Sean’s steps coming after me.

“Come on boy! Come on!” I was really warmed up now. I wanted action.

“Sam, now,” Sean wheeled, “what would you be doing?”

I grinned at him, ruffling his tousled mop of red hair. “Don’t you know, boy? Don’t you know?”

“Sam!” he cried, but I was already headed for the scrap lumber pile at the corner of the grounds. I pulled out a choice length of two-by-four, and turned toward Gorgo’s tank. Sean grabbed hold of my arm. “*Somhairle!*” he cried. “*Ná déan é! Nēan déan é!* Don’t do it!” he pleaded.

I threw him off me, and continued determinedly toward the cement basin. I could see the shape of Gorgo ahead of me, staring out through the wires, his tiny red eyes gleaming in the dark.

“Sam!” Sean cried, getting to his feet and racing after me. “Don’t! He’ll kill you.”

“What’s the difference?” I snarled. “One more death or other.”

I stumbled up to the first line of wires, the ones with the electric current running through them. Gorgo watched me, and moved closer, peering out at me. He raised his head and growled a spine-chilling warning, the echoes returning from the woodland of Battersea Park with an eerie wail.

Sean grabbed hold of me from behind, but I threw him to the ground and swung the two-by-four. I hit the first strand of wire. There was a crackling blue flash. The end of the two-by-four burst into flame.

Sean screamed.

Gorgo reared back, rising to his full height, bellowing frantically into the skies.

I swung the two-by-four again. A brilliant lightning flash followed. But this time the timber slipped from my numbed fingers and spun through the air into Gorgo’s enclosure. The sharp claws reached down quickly, grabbed up the timber, and imitated me, flailing at the electrified wires. He poked the timber through the wires, bouncing it up and down. Instantly a blinding sheet of flame curtained up between the monster and me.

Before I could react, the flaming two-by-four shot through the wires and hit me a glancing blow on my shoulder.

I went down in a heap.

Stunned, I lay there. The monster howled and beat his tail on the concrete flooring. Sean was weeping, tearing off his shirt, trying to smother me in it. I realized in a sort of vague way that my clothes were on fire, and that I could not move.

The boy blanketed me with his shirt, and tried to haul me to my feet. I was too heavy, too sodden with alcohol. He knelt beside me then, and I could see the tears streaming out of his eyes. Over my shoulder he looked up at the beast's head, peering down at us, and shuddered.

Sean shook me again. I finally roused myself enough to get to my knees. Trying to support most of my weight, Sean moved me slowly toward the circus wagon. With the last vestiges of my fading strength, I pulled myself together. I staggered up the wagon steps and fell onto my bed. He undressed me and covered me. I was too drunk, too stunned, to really care.

I was so exhausted from the long events of the day before I slept through till noon. When I awoke, I found a note from Joe:

TOOK THE KID TO SEE HIS SISTER. SLEEP TIGHT. JOE.

I grinned, got up, shaved, and wandered over to the pub across Queens Road for breakfast. I was amused at the newspaper headlines. One of them suspected the whole monster story to be a hoax, a deliberate attempt to build up box office patronage at the Gorgo exhibit. Another accused the prime minister of using the monster story to cover up and attack on the navy by a "foreign power." Another claimed that Nara Island had been destroyed by a malfunctioning intercontinental ballistic missile.

No one believed the truth.

I shook my head. The gullible people. What fools they were.

I grabbed a cab and went into London to Piccadilly, where I waited for Moira in the lobby of the Berkeley. Soon she and Sean and Joe came in from shopping, and we split up. Joe taking Sean back to Battersea Park to collect his things preparatory to moving in with Moira at the Berkeley, and I taking Moira on a tour of the city. I had to admit Joe was quite decent about everything. I wondered if he'd really reformed.

It was dusk when we got through a short sightseeing tour of London. Moira, who had never been among people much before, was like a hick from the boondocks. I was amused at the way she gaped at the buildings and watched the Londoners with her wide, innocent, sea-green eyes.

I took her out to Battersea Park to see Gorgo, and she shuddered and held my hand tightly as we stood there. I could feel the chills running down my own back. I couldn't forget how easily, and how accurately, Gorgo had thrown that flaming two-by-four at me the night before.

We went to the pub on Queens Road for dinner, and it was there that Moira saw her first television set. She was fascinated at watching the moving pictures coming from the little box, and she observed everything with undisguised fascination. Finally the evening newscast began. I pricked up my ears, too, trying to hear the broadcaster's words over the din of the pub, which was now beginning to fill with after-work customers.

"It is now regarded as certain that the creature is approaching the Thames Estuary," the announcer said blandly. "Following the disaster early this morning—the loss of a destroyer with all hands—the admiralty has deployed major forces of the North Seas Fleet off the mouth of the estuary in an attempt to locate and destroy the monster before it reaches the coastal defenses."

I glanced at Moira. Her eyes were wide and she was gazing hypnotically at the newscaster. Her lips moved slightly. I could imagine her whispered words: an unvoiced prayer of some kind. For Gorgo? Or for mankind.

"As a special feature of the BBC, we now take you to the inside of the Submarine Net Control Room where naval officers are even now closing the underwater nets guarding the Thames approach."

The scene on the television screen shifted to the Net Control Room. We could see a sailor turning a large wheel mounted on a wall into "LOCK" position. Lights flashed on a panel nearby.

"All secure, sir," said the sailor.

A lieutenant nodded and spoke into a phone. "We're just closing the last of the submarine nets now." He listened a moment, and then spoke. "Yes, sir."

The screen went blank and the BBC announcer's face appeared again. "We have established contact with one of our mobile television units aboard a submarine patrol operating outside the estuary. We now take you to the submarine patrol, sector two-eight."

The screen went blank and cleared again. We now saw the inside of a submarine. The captain, a radio operator, and a sonic technician were standing in front of a sonic recorder. I could see a squiggle, like an electrocardiograph, which emitted a noisy "beep-beep."

The captain of the submarine was standing at the periscope, slowly rotating it.

“Anything there, sir?”

The captain shook his head and continued his scanning.

The radio operator, on a phone, turned to the captain. “Captain, it’s Admiral Brooks. He wants to speak to you.”

The captain took the phone. “Yes, sir.” He listened a moment, and then said: “No, sir, Nothing here.”

The captain, carrying the phone, moved to the sonic recorder. At a signal from the captain, the sonic technician increased the volume. The “beeps” became more insistent, but still they continued in a regular, almost soothing, rhythm.

“The same, sir,” said the captain into the phone. “No change.” He handed the phone back to the radio operator.

The screen went black again and then we saw the BBC announcer. “Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “you have just seen a live on-the-spot report of the situation at the Thames Estuary. It is apparently obvious now that the monster—”

The announcer halted and turned, receiving a note handed to him from someone. The announcer raised his eyes quickly to the camera, signaling.

“We take you back to the Submarine Net Control Room—”

Instantly we saw the Submarine Net Control Room again. An ensign was speaking into a phone, his face intent and alert. “Yes, yes! Just one moment, please.”

A loud gonging sound cut him off short. The lieutenant turned quickly to the ensign, startled.

“The nets!” he cried. “The signal for the nets!”

The ensign spoke into the phone. “Hello! Hello!” He put the phone aside and turned to the lieutenant. “The connection is gone. I had him there a moment and—”

“Well, what did he say?”

“He said the nets have been torn. And then the connection was broken.”

The lieutenant turned and grabbed up another phone. “Admiral, sir! Admiral Brooks. The creature’s got through. She’s smashed the nets! There’s nothing we can do now. Standing by for instructions, sir!”

The screen went blank. I could feel the tension about me in the pub. Everyone who had been eating and chatting and drinking a moment before now sat stunned and silent, looking about furtively and fearfully. There was an air of horror and disbelief in everyone’s face.

Then the face of the BBC announcer flashed on, tense and strained. He read a slip of paper in his hand, now and then glancing up at the

camera.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we have received a communication from Army Headquarters in London, from the Commander-in-Chief of Operations. It states that the creature is believed to be following the course of the River Thames. The decision to use atomic weapons on the creature would be out of the question because of the densely populated area involved. Tanks and missiles will be used to stop the beast’s progress. The population is warned to remain indoors, however, to keep away from the river, and to remain calm.”

Instantly the pub was filled with the sound of nervous chatter and the babble of hysterical voices.

I gripped Moira’s hand. We stared at each other. “ ’Tis what I have guessed, *Somhairle*,” She whispered, “ ’Tis the end of the world.”

I shook my head. “No Moira. We’ll be able to take care of it. You watch.”

Now the screen of the television set showed a column of huge military tanks racing along the bank of the Thames River. At the head of the column a jeep, with a mounted siren screeching deafeningly, cleared the way. The streets seemed not overcrowded. Apparently the instructions of the government on the television had been followed.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” another announcer said, “we are stationed here with our mobile unit just outside the Tower Bridge. It is this spot that the army has decided to mount its final assault on the monster.”

As we watched, spellbound, the Tower Bridge flashed on the screen: two big fat Gothic columns of rock and masonry astride the Thames River, joined together at the top by footwalks, and at the bottom by movable twin bascules capable of swinging up and down to accommodate shipping.

We could see a naval ship of some kind passing through under the raised bascules, and then as the ship came clear, the two sections immediately lowered into place. The column of tanks, which had been waiting at the Tower Bridge approach, moved onto the stabilized span. Soldiers with bazookas and walkie-talkies leaped out of personnel trucks and took up positions on the bridge. Others ran into the two towers, and began the ascent to take up their places on the footwalks above.

The tanks moved in, facing downstream. Soldiers pushed huge searchlights into place on the bridge.

“There she is!” cried the announcer.

We all strained our eyes. Yes! We could see her! In the water past the bridge, a huge head, dimly visible, emerged from the murk. A murmur of tense excitement shot through the people in the pub about

us.

We saw a soldier shoot off a flare-gun. The flare's parachutes opened directly above the shape in the river. The flare-lights fell slowly, illuminating the darkened river with bright burning red light. The huge, red-eyed head of the monster became clearly visible. A volley of shots rang out. Long trains of tracer bullets beat down into the water at the beast.

The beast vanished. One instant she was there, the next she had gone.

More flares zoomed into the air. Then, with unbelievable speed, the monster rose to her full height just beyond the bridge, roaring and waving her talons about. She reached up and grasped the steel girders of the bridge, ripping at the cables, smashing at the massive towers.

A moan of something quite like pain squeezed from the throats of all of us in that pub. No one moved. It was incredible, the strength and the ferocity of the beast! And we could see it clearly and vividly on that television screen.

The television camera kept on. Flares fell about the beast, lighting her grotesque form with a greenish light, showing clearly her fiendish grin, her pointed teeth, and her massive, destructive talons. She reared up, and swiped with her tail at the north tower of the bridge. Stones and rubble pelted down in a huge swirling cloud of dust. We heard screams and shrieks, and we saw soldiers struggle in the Thames, thrown there by the lashing force of the beast's attack.

Then, with terrifying suddenness, the monster backed up, raised her claws, and crushed them down on the bridge span. The footwalks split apart. Men went plunging into the water, screaming. Tracer bullets wove a crazy pattern in the air and then ceased. Flares fell into the Thames, burning brightly. The monster reached up and pulled apart the cables linking the towers to the banks. Then she grasped the two wide steel bascules and ripped them from their moorings at the tower bases. She flung them backwards under her into the water. Tanks and men tumbled out helplessly.

Standing there in the middle of the devastation, she then swung her two arms out wide like a man doing calisthenics, striking and buckling the two heavily-built Gothic towers, breaking them in the middle. They collapsed into two piles of rubble at each side of the river.

The immense obscenity turned and viewed the pile of masonry and steel which had once been the proud Tower Bridge. Then she turned toward us. She raised her hideous head in the air and let loose a shriek of triumph and warning. Then she dove into the water heading up the river, pushing aside wrecked tanks, twisted steel, and broken human bodies like so many match sticks.

The television screen went blank.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” a man’s shaking voice croaked weakly, “due to technical difficulties, the program previously scheduled has been temporarily disrupted. We will now hear the London Marching Band in a special selection.”

Nobody was listening to the music. Panic had erupted in the pub. Like a wild thing unleashed, the crowd rushed for the doorway. Patrons clawed at one another savagely.

I kept Moira clutched to me. We were sucked into a vortex of milling people and abruptly spewed out into the street.

Dazed and stunned, we stood there, watching the panic-stricken Londoners fleeing in all directions. To the east we could see a strange, ominous brightness lighting the sky. Something was burning.

“Has Ogra set the city on fire?” cried Moira, looking at the glowing sky.

“I don’t know,” I said, struggling to keep my own panic under control. I turned and looked around. I had no idea what to do now. Set the beast free? Possibly . . .

Before I could act, I heard a screech of brakes, and there was Joe in his cream-colored Frazer-Nash. He leaned out and yelled at us. I was never so damned happy to see that lean, yellow-eyed face in my life before.

“Sam! Moira! The kid’s gone! Sean! We’ve got to get him!”

I gripped Moira’s arm. “Sean?”

She screamed. “You let him go? You—”

“I didn’t let him go! He was there, packing, and a woman came and got him! I just got there and heard.”

“A woman?” I couldn’t follow that.

“She claimed she was his mother. Said she’d seen the write-ups in the paper, and knew he was Sean McCartin. She had blonde hair. Blue eyes. A mole on her left cheek, they tell me.”

I stared at Moira.

“It was!” she cried, “She’s my stepmother! *Maighréad*. Oh God! Where did she take him?”

“To the Berkeley Hotel to find you. They want to meet you there.”

I stared at the reddening sky. “The Berkeley! That’s near the monster! We’ve got to get Sean! Come on! Push that pedal to the floor, Joe! See if she can do that one hundred and twenty-five miles an hour you’ve been shouting about.”

We piled into the car and Joe took off like a bat out of hell.

Chapter 14

The little Frazer-Nash roared along Grosvenor Road, on the north bank of the Thames, on to Westminster Bridge Road, and we could see the orange glow blossoming out into the sky ahead of us. Moira tugged at my arm suddenly, pointing out toward the river from Westminster Square.

I turned. It was a navy gasoline barge. On its side I could read the big red letters: DANGER—HIGH OCTANE.

“Joe!” I shouted. “They’re going to try to burn the monster out of the river.”

We turned and headed out into Westminster Bridge where we stopped. We saw the oncoming monster. We saw the officer on deck shouting to his men, waving his arms. Gasoline poured out of the opening on the side of the ship into the water.

“Oh my God in heaven!” cried Moira, pointing out into the murk of the river. “ ’Tis she! ’Tis Ogra!”

It was she. The monster had reared out of the water and was now slapping along, glancing about unhurriedly, watching the tiny ants of people running about helter-skelter. She kept right on coming. More barges joined the first one, emptying more gasoline into the water. Then on signal, the sailors and officers jumped into launches and sped for the sides of The River.

The monster kept coming forward slowly, sniffing the air as if she were curious about the strange gasoline smell. The men from the barges hid down behind sandbags erected at the edge of the River. We could see an officer raising his hand.

A sailor on the embankment fired a flame-thrower into the water. The flames leapt from the thrower to the gasoline. Instantly the entire width of the Thames was a mass of flames. The wall of fire moved swiftly toward the advancing creature. Now, for the first time, the monster came to a halt, and looked apprehensively in front of her. She stared down at the fire, now rapidly enveloping her, and then reared back.

With her tremendous tail she slapped the curtain of fire away from her. Flaming water enveloped the barges. The monster struck again, washing the barges with burning gasoline. The barges were now a mass of swirling flames. The crackling sound of the holocaust filled the air. Smoke billowed down over us like a blanket.

As we sat there in the Frazer-Nash, stunned by the sight before us of

the burning Thames, I heard a strange far-off sound, coming from in back of us, coming from Battersea Park.

It was the anguished, lonesome cry of Gorgo, in his enclosure. Gorgo!

Now the huge monster in front of us, towering two hundred feet into the air, cocked her greenish head in the direction of Gorgo's sound, and emitted a howling screaming answer. With one more flick of her tail at the flaming barges, she turned, wading through the sheets of flaming gasoline, and started to come ashore on the north side of the river, a half block ahead of us.

All around sirens screamed. Fire trucks appeared from nowhere, playing jets of water on the blazing Thames. A wind had come up. It was carrying the flames onto rooftops nearby. The reddish glow in the heavens spread out like a nasty, noxious stain. The wreckage of the Tower Bridge had apparently caught fire, along with the countless broken electric power lines.

Joe gunned the Frazer-Nash and we backed up, heading for St. James Park and Piccadilly. We had to get to the Berkeley on St. James Street before the monster did. The general plan of the monster's progress was not quite evident. In wading ashore, she had definitely turned in a direction away from Gorgo's pen. She must have some reason. I couldn't figure it.

A sound truck approached us from the rear, blasting out with a deep roaring voice:

"The street must be kept clear for military and defense personnel! Repeat, the street must be kept clear for military and defense personnel. The Ministry of Civil Defense has declared a state of Emergency for all areas of London within three miles of the Thames River."

In the pandemonium of crying voices and running people, I'm sure no one even heard it.

"If you are without shelter, go to the nearest underground and stay there! Repeat. If you are without shelter go to the nearest underground! Please keep off the streets! I repeat. Military authorities request all persons to keep off the streets!"

We turned and headed up St. James. I could see the shape of the Berkeley at Piccadilly corner. "There it is, Joe!" I cried. "Not much further! Keep going!"

It was becoming increasingly difficult to drive. The street was a crawling mass of panic-stricken humanity. Cabs jockeyed about for position. Cars were abandoned. Policemen were rushing about trying to bring some semblance of order to the milling crowds. Out of upper story windows pop-eyed civilians peered down, staring frenziedly at

the mass of close-packed humanity below.

The tide of humanity engulfed the Frazer-Nash. We were literally lifted off the ground, and turned half about. Joe pulled the keys out of the ignition.

“Come on! We’ve got to run for it!”

I grabbed Moira, and held tightly to her. We pushed through the screaming mass of people in the direction of Piccadilly. Around us sweating, hysterically screaming people were pummeling one another, crying out, shouting, and going nowhere. It was the end of the world.

And then, as we shoved and beat our way desperately against each other, trying to keep from being crushed, there was an instant’s silence, and a terrifying scream of horror and fear.

I looked up.

The monster had turned aside from the Thames, and was now pushing its way into Piccadilly Circus, half obscured in the night by a cloud of dust and debris kicked up by her own destructive movements. Air raid sirens squealed about us. A man with a huge white beard stood on top of an automobile in the center of the ocean of panicked people shouting:

“It’s Armageddon! Your sins have found you out! It’s the prophecy fulfilled!”

As he stood there, screaming, the crowd surged and ebbed. A hand reached up out of somewhere. He went down. He did not appear again.

“Quick!” Joe yelled. “Into the underground!”

He pointed toward a sign. We pulled along after him, fighting our way each step. I saw the big monster’s form lumbering along Piccadilly. With enraged howls, the big beast would throw her talons into a building and tear the walls to pieces as she touched them. Bricks cascaded into the pavements, bloodying screaming pedestrians below. Bodies hurled through the air, literally torn out of the falling buildings.

Fire broke out. Electric wires crackled with a sinister sibilant sound. Smoke and dirt boiled out of the destruction toward us. The crowd became a huge, coiling reptilian beast itself, whirling about like cattle in a mill.

I glanced up. The monster was holding a screaming human being in her talons, eyeing it curiously. Then, as I stared, fascinated, the big beast slowly crushed the life out of it as a man would an insect. Then she shrieked in triumph, and moved again toward us.

I could see the underground entrance now. I gave a frantic shove to get us into the doorway and to safety before the thing swooped down

on us and crushed us all to pulp.

Nobody could breathe. Like a wave rolling onto the beach, the entire crowd on the sidewalk pushed and forced itself into the underground passageway, just as the big beast smashed a building on the corner into rubble.

It was the Berkeley Hotel. I didn't say a word. Moira must have seen too. Sean and his mother, Maighréad, were surely dead.

A gas line burst in the shattered pavement. A geyser of flame shot into the air. I could hear the shrieks of the burning people near it as they tried to escape the flames. We were wedged in so tightly in the entryway to the underground that none of us could move. Dust and smoke beat down on us. We stumbled over the steps to the platform. As we did so, someone next to me cried out in horror.

I looked up at the ceiling. Bricks popped out of the vaulted archway, showering down into the crowd. I saw a woman's head split open. She sank out of sight. The crowd gaped upward.

I grabbed Moira and Joe and we forced our way through the crowd onto the subway tracks. Others followed. I could see the tunnel ahead, a vast cave of darkness. Bricks poured down around us. Cement peppered us. The crowd was battling itself now, trying to dodge the disintegrating ceiling, murderously insane in its struggle for self-preservation.

"Hurry up!" I screamed, literally carrying Moira with me. Joe needed no urging. An old man stumbled into me.

There was a ripping, tearing sound then, a strident mechanical sound above the shouts of the crowd. I looked back over my shoulder. A huge talon broke through the ceiling of the underground platform. It groped down through the hole toward the squirming crowd.

Down the tracks to our back, a headlight pierced the gloom. A subway train was approaching the platform. I could see the motorman's face as he looked up into the ceiling above him and saw the huge claw. He screamed and frantically tried to apply the brakes.

It was too late. As I watched, too stunned to move, the train was inundated by an avalanche of collapsing stone and dirt as the monster smashed against the tunnel from above with all the pressure of her body. The train vanished in a pile of brick and rubble.

Water burst from the ground. A water main had broken. A cascade of spray shot high into the air. Broken glass showered down onto the crowd of people now half on and half off the subway platform, fighting their way toward where we were.

We turned and ran ahead, the water from the broken main spreading about us rapidly, lapping at our ankles.

Moira went down. I cried out to her and tried to pull her to her feet. She shook her head, closing her eyes in pain. It was her ankle.

I lifted her in my arms, the water swirling about my knees now. I pushed through the water, with Joe ahead of me, trying to clear the way. People in various stages of hysteria and emotional frenzy poured by on each side of us, desperately trying to keep above the water that was fast enveloping us all.

The ground shook again. I looked up, fearful that the entire tunnel was collapsing about me. But nothing happened. We kept pushing on until we came to a turn in the tunnel about a hundred yards further on.

The water piled up around us, first to the waists, then to the shoulders. I lifted Moira above my head, stumbling along, my head going under every other step. Joe was fighting the current that enveloped us.

Then, as I glanced up, I saw something that looked like a ventilation shaft.

"Joe!" I cried, gesturing upward.

He turned. He nodded, and came to us, where we were struggling against the current, and tried to pull the two of us along with him toward the shaft. Floating timbers collided with us, making movement almost impossible. A human body floated by, face up, eyes staring.

Joe found the ladder in the darkness and climbed up first, reaching back for Moira. I lifted her up to him, pushing her from below. The three of us scrambled upward. A man followed just behind us. The water rose about us as we ascended, almost as if it were reaching out to catch our ankles.

Cold fresh air poured down over us and Joe called back: "Here we are!"

Ten more rungs and I fell out onto the pavement of a cluttered street. Joe dragged me to my feet. Moira stood beside me, her dress plastered wetly to her body, her breasts and hips clearly outlined. A redness in the sky flickered and glowed. Fires were burning all about us.

"Where are we?" I asked, turning and looking around.

Joe shook his head. "No idea."

" 'Tis cold I am!" Moira shivered, holding me tightly.

"We've got to get out of here," I said. "Where in hell's the car?"

"Way over to the north, I'd say," Joe muttered.

We moved slowly and stumbling forward in the street cluttered with broken glass, split timber, and smoking rubbish. A huge searchlight beam flashed into the darkness ahead of us. The glare caught a

gigantic green shape clearly. The monster!

She was moving down a street at right angles to us, heading toward the river and Westminster Bridge. I now know the street was probably Birdcage Walk. The searchlight held to her head, moving along with it. She roared out a challenge, and we could hear the far-off answering cry of Gorgo in his enclosure at Battersea Park.

This made the mother monster flail her talons about. The powerful tail thumped the pavement and shook the ground. The sky behind the monster glowed in a sudden flare of light.

A second searchlight joined in, covering on the head from another angle. And a third. And a fourth. They all centered on the monster's head. Smoke and dust poured up around her now, highlighted by the searchlights.

I recognized one landmark ahead. Big Ben. The monster was approaching Westminster Bridge at the House of Parliament. We ran forward. The monster saw the big tower. She moved directly toward it. The searchlights followed her.

An earth-shaking series of explosions made the buildings around us tremble. Huge fiery missile-like streaks shot into the air near the monster's neck. The missiles all missed except one. That one exploded directly in the monster's face.

"Missiles!" yelled Joe. "They're trying to bring her down with missiles!"

" 'Twill not bring Ogra down," Moira said softly.

She was right.

The monster roared at the tower of Big Ben, grasping it in her massive talons. The beams of light focused on Big Ben. Again another cluster of missiles sailed into the air, around the beast's head. Two of them hit the tower.

The big beast began shaking the tower now, somehow identifying it as the origin of all her troubles. Bricks flew out of the tower, showering the earth. Stones plummeted. There was a rending, snapping, final sound. The searchlights clearly outlined the big tower as it shook for one last time, and snapped in the middle. The top half, with the world-famous big clock, smashed down into the darkness of Westminster Square.

One searchlight abruptly swung to an awkward angle, it did not move. All four beams of light came to rest, pointed crazily in the sky, unaimed.

The monster moved away from us, going up along the river side of the Houses of Parliament. With a gigantic flip of her massive tail, she began breaking in the walls of the Houses of Parliament, flinging

debris and broken bodies in all directions.

Dust and dirt poured back over us, combining with the clouds of smoke already sifting onto us from the buildings as the remains began to burn.

Then suddenly, without the least warning, the beast slid down into the waters of the Thames near Westminster Bridge, and vanished.

Arm and arm, Moira and I waded through the murk and gloom after Joe, joining the hundreds of crazed people, wandering about without purpose in the darkened, rubbish-cluttered streets.

Bleeding and covered with filth, perspiration, and mud we pushed out into a demolished wasteland of pavement, and broken walls. Around us loomed the skeleton-like shells of dead and gutted buildings. Ghostly shadows of lost souls roamed about, pitifully picking at mountains of rock and wrecked household things.

Moira sobbed, covering her eyes with her hands. “ ’Tis the end of the world!” she wept. “Take me from it!”

Joe plowed ahead, past St. James Park, searching for street names. Then he signaled us to follow him. In the gloom I tripped over broken window sashes and a cracked bathtub, perched crazily in a pile of wood splinters. I dragged Moira to the corner where Joe was grinning, pointing.

There, in front of our bloodshot eyes, stood the Frazer-Nash. We climbed in, exhausted. Joe flipped on the starter. It was a miracle. The engine caught instantly.

“Where to, kid?” he asked, grinning wolfishly.

“Battersea Park,” I snapped. “We’re going to let that damned Gorgo out. Then maybe we can shake this monster.”

Joe’s eyes narrowed. He took a breath. “Sam,” he said slowly, “you were right. You and Moira. I was wrong. I’d be a damned fool not to admit it now.”

He started the car, turned around, and we shot through the street clogged with abandoned automobiles and strewn with piles of rubbish and an occasional corpse.

Chapter 15

We passed through the demoralized city, skirting the Thames on Grosvenor Road. The monster was nowhere in sight. She apparently had submerged temporarily. Or perhaps she was off on another tangent wrecking her special type of devastation on the beleaguered city.

We crossed Chelsea, roared into Battersea Park, and came to a stop near the monster's enclosure. We were amazed at the activity around the place.

A kind of command post had been set up near Andrew Dorkin's office. Temporary telephone connections had been strung in, a field switchboard set up, and an army operator sat at work in front of it.

To one side stood an army colonel talking on a phone.

A huge temporary panel containing voltage and amperage dials had been erected in the open. A couple of electricians were showing the set-up to two men. I could see who they were: Professors Hendricks and Flaherty.

As we got out of the car and passed by the colonel on the phone, I heard him say: "The circuits have just been completed, sir."

The colonel nodded at something he had heard on the phone, and lifted his hand. Instantly the needles on the dials jumped into life. I could see one of them center on 50,000 volts. Then after a moment, it went to 100,000 volts. Then to 150,000 as another switch was thrown.

I whistled. That was a lot of voltage. I wondered where it all came from. Then I recalled having heard that one of London's biggest generation stations was located at Lots Road in Battersea Park. Perhaps the entire set-up here had been hooked in directly to the dynamos.

I motioned to Moira and led her over to the circus wagon. I wanted to gather up my stuff to get it ready for transport. I didn't care where I went, as long as I got out of that cursed area.

Over my shoulders I saw that Joe had gone to join the two professors. They were chatting among themselves.

I told Moira to wait for me and I mounted the steps of the circus wagon. When I pulled the door open I was greeted by a wild cry of delight.

"Sam!"

"Sean!" I cried in astonishment. The little guy jumped right up into my arms. I set him down, and Moira bent over him, hugging him, crying out with great gusting sobs.

"*Tú atá slánsábháilte!*" she gabbled at him in Gaelic. "You're safe and sound! Oh, Sean, Sean I thought you were dead!"

"No. 'Tis me. And I've a surprise for you."

Moira looked up, puzzled. I glanced around. "Surprise?"

Sean stood aside and called into the wagon. "*Máthair.*" He grinned back at me as a slender, blonde, gentle-eyed woman stepped out onto the steps and walked down to us.

"*Maighréad!*" cried Moira, and rushed into the woman's arms.

"The moment we found you'd not gone to the hotel, we came out here to search for you," Sean explained seriously.

"The hotel was destroyed," I said. "By the monster."

Sean nodded. " 'Tis as we both said."

"I know."

"But these wires," Sean went on. " 'Tis like a machination of the devil. What is it all for?"

"To stop the monster, Sean," I said. "With electricity."

Sean shivered. " 'Tis not fair. They should both be let go. Ogra only wants her baby."

"You stay here," I ordered them. Moira nodded, chatting in Gaelic a mile a minute with her stepmother Maighréad.

I strode off across the field toward the command post. I joined Joe and the professors in front of the big board.

"Four million volts and full amperage," Hendricks was nodding. "The wires won't take any more."

I nodded to him and to Flaherty. "Whose idea was it to set up the net here?" I asked.

Hendricks looked at me a moment. "The generating station for the London Underground is located in Battersea Park. We've hooked it directly. The monster is sure to come here, with her one inside the enclosure."

"I see. Do you think four million volts will do the trick?"

Hendricks shrugged and turned to the colonel. "It's the most we can provide."

"It has to work," the colonel whispered tensely.

Suddenly everyone turned to Gorgo's enclosure. The beast was lifting its head in a mournful cry.

Almost instantly, in the distance, came a powerful roaring bleat from across Battersea Park.

“Hit those lights!” somebody cried, and the big searchlights went on, poking fiery fingers into the night sky. The ground began shaking, and then we could all see the awesome shape of the huge monster as she appeared above the silhouetted trees of Batersea Park, caught in the searchlight beams, moving forward with her steady, stolid plodding. Trees snapped in two, and branches crashed to the ground.

Around us now the circus animals roared and prowled restlessly. They could scent the danger in the air.

The monster roared out again, voicing her challenge to all of us, and telling Gorgo she was coming to him.

Gorgo thrashed about in his enclosure. He approached the wires lining the cage and beat his head against them. There was an instantaneous flash, and Gorgo reeled back, howling in pain. He slid down into the water of the tank, crouching and snarling, cooling off. Then he moved out again, eyeing the wires and the enclosure malevolently.

The big monster screamed out and moved closer. The shadowy body towered over us like a mountain. Trees continued to go down in front of the massive feet and tail.

The sound of fighter airplanes filled the air. I looked up. I could see them humming overhead like angry hornets. The first plane, the leader of the V formation, went into a dive, heading straight for the huge monster. As it dove, it fired two missiles. Both missed the monster, exploding on each side of the big head.

The plane pulled out of its dive, turned, and climbed. A second plane followed it, loosing two more missiles. The earth shook as the missiles blew up in a tree nearby.

The big beast leaned down over us, reaching out her powerful talons toward the enclosure where she could now plainly see Gorgo. Gorgo was staring up at her.

She reached her talons out toward the high tension wires, and immediately blinding electric sparks cascaded up and down like a shimmering curtain of fire. Another plane dove at her from above, loosing two missiles which exploded with blinding intensity close to us.

Rearing back from the display of electricity in front of her, the huge mother monster reached out and slashed at the wires with the talons. A blinding sheet of lightning streaked from wire to wire and she cried out in pain. Her whole body shuddered with the terrific impact of four million volts. Gorgo joined in with a sympathetic scream.

The huge mother beast reached up and began tearing angrily at a giant pylon erected near the enclosure to carry the wires in. The steel tower shook and trembled and then crumpled in the middle, bringing

down all the high tension wires with it. The whole tangled mass exploded in a blinding flash of light, heat, and orange smoke.

At the same moment one of the diving planes loosed two more missiles at the enclosure, tried to pull out of the dive, but caught a wing tip against the top of one of the high power-wire pylons. The plane veered crazily spinning around in a horizontal circle, pinwheeling to the ground.

Its passage lopped off tree tops as it continued in its erratic course downward. It slid into the ground at the border of the London gas tanks nearby. The plane exploded. One instant later the city gas tanks went up, one by one, in a deafening roar that shook the ground and sent clouds of smoke pouring into the skies.

Flames shot upward, painting a vivid background to the dramatic conflict centered at Gorgo's enclosure.

I held my hand in front of my face. The heat was intense. The continuous flare of missiles and electric static blinded me. No one said a word. People about me were frozen into immobility by this amazing and titanic struggle of animal power against electric power.

The big mother monster became enraged at the fire and the noise all about her. She reached up into the top of the nearest extant pylon, grasped it tightly, and began rocking it back and forth. Electricity crackled and snapped, sending blue flashes out in all directions. The monster gathered together four of the pylons, and tugged at the bundle.

Electricity shot through her on its way to the ground, making her entire body tremble and vibrate. The greenish phosphorescence of her outer layer changed color to a dazzling blue, and then to a crimson reddish hue. But she still struggled. The pylons uprooted. She hurled them high into the air. Millions of live wires, torn from their insulators, wriggled about the park, like fiery snakes, burning and scorching everything in sight.

I turned just in time to see one of the hot wires uncoil and strike Joe's Frazer-Nash. In an instant the entire car disintegrated, blown into bits. It shuddered and became a mass of flames and smoke. I turned back to Gorgo's enclosure. The huge mother monster was ripping at the last of the power wires. All the lights about the area had gone out now. Flames from the burning London gas tanks in the distance silhouetted the whole scene in an eerie red glow. I saw the big mother monster reach down and rip up the steel strands of wire that had been carefully constructed over the enclosure to keep Gorgo inside.

In the big monster's claws, the toughest steel snapped like thread. There was nothing any of us could do. We stood there, glued to the

spot with disbelief, overawed by the tremendous evidence of power and force displayed by this ancient animal.

With her huge feet, she began crushing in the sides of the enclosure. Gorgo himself stayed inside the tank, waiting for the break-through. As he saw the big mother monster's talons reaching in through an opening in the steel wall, Gorgo climbed out of the water and started up the pile of twisted and smouldering metal and rubble that lay scattered about.

I turned just in time to see that Moira, Sean and his mother had joined me to one side. They, too, were watching the rescue of Gorgo with wide-eyed fascination. I must admit I saw something of satisfaction on their faces, as if they all three wanted this to happen, as if they all three always knew that this manifestation of man's greed and inhumanity would come to this end.

It was all over. The huge monster stooped down, lifted Gorgo's tremendous weight as if it were a feather, and deposited Gorgo in the middle of Battersea Park—or what was left of it after her previous advance through it.

Then the two of them began to move slowly through the woods toward the river. In the background behind them I watched the flames from the city gas tanks mounting higher into the air. Darkness lay beyond. London had no electric power left. Everything was silence and stillness in the biggest city on earth.

Someone moved beside me. I turned. It was Professor Hendricks, joined by Professor Flaherty. They were watching the departure of the two monsters, the same as I. They said nothing. At this point, what could they say?

Moira came to me. She took my hand in hers and pressed herself close to me. Her body was trembling. I gripped her and hard and reassuringly.

"They'll be going back now," she whispered. "Back to the island. Back to the sea."

Sean and his mother approached. The boy gazed up at me with his wide clear eyes. "Where he belongs, where they both belonged, and should never have been taken from."

I touched the boy's hair and ruffled it. "Maybe you're right, Sean."

The two unearthly, prehistoric figures had advanced almost all the distance across the Park and were ready to enter the Thames. Dust and fog swirled about them. The flames of the burning gas tanks bathed them both in a dull crimson glow. The big mother monster turned her huge head and gazed back at us there in the murk, her fiery red eyes gleaming.

Lifting her head to the heavens she loosed a final rumbling roar, like distant thunder, a warning to us all, to mankind in general, and turned and vanished in the fog and mist.

I felt Moira's eyes on me. I looked down at her.

“ 'Tis a warning,” she whispered. “ 'Tis a warning to mankind. This visitation must be heeded, or there will be worse to come. *Nuair atá tú go sóúil fulaing thú féin.*”

I squeezed her hand, remembering the quotation: “Let well enough alone.”

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I wondered if mankind would heed the warning.

I doubted it.

Man has a way of facing up to even the toughest challenges of the universe—and of life itself.

That's why we're here.

But I leaned down and kissed Moira anyway. I knew she meant it in the right spirit.

The End